

OCTOBER • DECEMBER 1954

3/6

# SIGHT AND SOUND

*The Film  
Quarterly*



**SONG AND DANCE: the musical in pictures**

*Also*

**THE FILMS OF KUROSAWA: Jay Leyda**

**MORALITY PLAYS RIGHT AND LEFT: Pauline Kael**

**RICHARD TODD  
EVA BARTOK  
JOHN GREGSON**

in  
**VENETIAN  
BIRD**

(G.F.D. Release)



**DAVID FARRAR  
NADIA GRAY**

in  
**NIGHT  
WITHOUT  
STARS**

(G.F.D. Release)

**LIAM REDMOND  
ANDRE MORELL  
MARY MORRIS**  
in

**HIGH  
TREASON**

(G.F.D. Release)



**GEORGE RAFT  
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in  
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# A GUIDE TO CURRENT FILMS

Films which are considered likely to be of special interest to SIGHT AND SOUND readers are denoted by one or more stars.

- \*APACHE** (*United Artists*) Jean Peters and Burt Lancaster as sympathetic but not wholly credible Apaches, in an attractive and sincere study of a young brave's resistance to the white man. (Director, Robert Aldrich)
- BEACHCOMBER, THE** (*G.F.D.*) The second screen adaptation of Somerset Maugham's *Vessel of Wrath* proves a good deal less lively than the Charles Laughton-Elsa Lanchester version. (Robert Newton, Glynis Johns, Paul Rogers; director, Muriel Box.)
- \*\*BELLES OF ST. TRINIANS, THE** (*British Lion*) A boisterous romp at Ronald Searle's dreadful school. The shameless, likeable burlesque is watched over lovingly by headmistress Alastair Sim. *Reviewed.* (Joyce Grenfell, George Cole; director, Frank Launder.)
- BENGAL RIFLES** (*G.F.D.*) Period action thriller set in India, with Captain Rock Hudson saving the British Raj; efficiently staged battle scenes; above-average Technicolor. (Arlene Dahl, Ursula Thiess; director, Laslo Benedek.)
- BETRAYED** (*M-G-M*) Ingenuous spy story, set in Holland at the time of the Arnhem battle; some implausible spying from Lana Turner and resistance-leading from Victor Mature; agreeable (Eastman Colour) scenery. (Clark Gable; director, Gottfried Reinhardt.)
- BLACK KNIGHT, THE** (*Columbia*) The Arthurian cycle in full swing: an invasion of England by Saracens and Cornishmen averted by Alan Ladd. (Patricia Medina; director, Tay Garnett.)
- BLACK SHIELD OF FALWORTH, THE** (*G.F.D.*) A CinemaScope lesson in English history, set in the reign of Henry IV; fair hokum, with much jousting on the green and a plethora of American accents. (Tony Curtis, Janet Leigh; director, Rudolph Mate.)
- \*BLE EN HERBE, LE** (*Miracle*) Autant-Lara's adaptation of a novel by Colette: civilised but rather cold. (Edwige Feuillère, Pierre Michel Beck, Nicole Berger.)
- \*CAFE DU CADRAN** (*Archway*) Extreme example of post-war (1947) French realistic school: a thin triangle melodrama, quietly but admirably played by Bernard Blier and Blanchette Brunoy. (Aimé Clariond; director, Jean Gehret, supervised by Henri Decoin.)
- \*\*CAINE MUTINY, THE** (*Columbia*) Screen version of Herman Wouk's celebrated best-seller; the central story and Humphrey Bogart's fine performance are the strong points of an otherwise rather pedestrian adaptation. *Reviewed.* (Van Johnson, Fred MacMurray; director, Edward Dmytryk.)
- \*O CANGACEIRO** (*The Bandit*) (*Gala-Cameo-Poly*) The first Brazilian film seen here is a violent mixture of cruelty, romance and local colour. Some interesting scenes, though the approach is too conventional and impersonal. *Reviewed.* (Milton Ribeiro, Alberto Ruschel; director, Lima Barreto.)
- CHILDREN OF LOVE** (*Gala-Cameo-Poly*) Extraordinary goings-on in a home for unmarried mothers. Tasteless and tedious, with a thin veneer of social preaching. (Etchika Choureau, Lisa Bourdin; director, Leonide Moguy.)
- DEMETRIUS AND THE GLADIATORS** (*Fox*) A sequel to *The Robe*: spiffing gladiatorial combats, unlikely biblical dialogue, strange sexual undertones, adorably preposterous Virgins of Venus, all in CinemaScope. (Victor Mature, Susan Hayward; director, Delmer Daves.)
- \*DIAL M FOR MURDER** (*Warners*) Hitchcock's version of the play about a near-perfect murder; ingenious story, very competently mounted. *Reviewed.* (Ray Milland, Grace Kelly, Robert Cummings.)
- FLAME AND THE FLESH, THE** (*M-G-M*) Sex melodrama with Italian backgrounds, tamely directed by Richard Brooks; Lana Turner, as the bad girl of Naples, works tirelessly but to little effect. (Pier Angeli, Carlos Thompson.)
- GARDEN OF EVIL** (*Fox*) Gold-hunting and Apache-dodging in CinemaScope scenery; good camerawork, and a ferociously determined attempt at a *femme fatale* by Susan Hayward. (Gary Cooper, Richard Widmark; director, Henry Hathaway.)
- GREEN SCARF, THE** (*British Lion*) Sombre melodrama, with Kieron Moore as a blind, deaf-mute Frenchman accused of murder, and Michael Redgrave as the aged lawyer who successfully defends him. (Ann Todd, Leo Genn; director, George More O'Ferrall.)
- HER TWELVE MEN** (*M-G-M*) Treacly story in which Greer Garson, a teacher in an American boys' school, predictably wins all hearts. (Robert Ryan, Barry Sullivan; director, Robert Z. Leonard.)
- HIGH AND THE MIGHTY, THE** (*Warners*) John Wayne takes nearly two-and-a-half-hours to nurse a crippled passenger aircraft to a safe landing. Some unbelievably banal dialogue, set to a shattering Tiomkin score; CinemaScope. (Claire Trevor, Robert Stack; director, William Wellman.)
- \*IRON MASK, THE** (*Gala-Cameo-Poly*) Reissue of Douglas Fairbanks Senior's last silent film (1929), a sequel to *The Three Musketeers*, with narrative spoken by Douglas Fairbanks Junior. (Marguerite de la Motte; director, Allan Dwan.)
- KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE** (*M-G-M*) Solemn and pretentious Arthurian spectacle in CinemaScope. (Robert Taylor, Ava Gardner, Mel Ferrer; director, Richard Thorpe.)
- \*LIVING IT UP** (*Paramount*) Remake of *Nothing Sacred*, with Jerry Lewis in the Carole Lombard part; well above average Martin and Lewis vehicle, containing a superb, orgiastic jitterbug number by Sheree North. (Director, Norman Taurog.)
- \*LUCKY ME** (*Warners*) The first CinemaScope musical; cheerful and homely, rather than hard-hitting entertainment, with a bright performance by Doris Day. (Robert Cummings, Phil Silvers; director, Jack Donohue.)
- \*\*ON THE WATERFRONT** (*Columbia*) Marlon Brando gives a brilliant performance in Elia Kazan's clever, strident and showy melodrama of the New York docks. *Reviewed.* (Eva Marie Saint, Karl Malden, Lee J. Cobb.)
- \*\*PUSHOVER** (*Columbia*) Good, almost very good, crime melodrama, skilfully plotted. Direction (Richard Quine, who made *Drive a Crooked Road*) noticeably craftsmanlike, but forced to rely on leading players (Fred MacMurray, Kim Novak) unfortunately inadequate.
- \*REAR WINDOW** (*Paramount*) A crippled news photographer suspects that one of his neighbours is a murderer, and proves his point. An ingenious, heartless, intermittently entertaining example of latter-day Hitchcock. *Reviewed.* (James Stewart, Grace Kelly, Wendell Corey.)
- \*RETOUR DE DON CAMILLO, LE** (*Miracle*) Another instalment of the friendly feud between the Catholic priest and the Communist mayor. Very professional handling by Duvivier, but the author's glibness and evasions prove hard to take. (Fernandel, Gino Cervi.)
- \*\*ROMEO AND JULIET** (*G.F.D.*) Castellani's location-shot and respectful version of the play. Inexperienced leading players, very handsome settings and costumes. (Laurence Harvey, Susan Shentall, Flora Robson.)
- ROSE-MARIE** (*M-G-M*) The third film version of the thirty-year-old operetta. CinemaScope and realistic settings merely emphasise the tedium, relieved only by the comic talents of Bert Lahr and Marjorie Main. (Howard Keel, Ann Blyth, director, Mervyn LeRoy.)
- \*SABRINA FAIR** (*Paramount*) Cinderella story in which chauffeur's daughter wins industrial tycoon; smart dialogue and attractive performances from Audrey Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart; though Billy Wilder's direction takes things a little slowly and heavily. *Reviewed.*
- \*SALT OF THE EARTH** (*Film Traders*) Heavily propagandist account of a miners' strike in New Mexico; interest mainly sociological. (Rosaura Revueltas; director, Herbert J. Biberman.)
- \*THEM!** (*Warners*) Edmund Gwenn leads the extermination squads against alarmingly enormous, carnivorous ants; lively, plausible science fiction, the best thing in this line since *The War of the Worlds*. (James Whitmore, Joan Weldon; director, Gordon Douglas.)
- THREE COINS IN THE FOUNTAIN** (*Fox*) Three secretaries hunt husbands in Rome; inferior, rather incoherent magazine fiction, with CinemaScope views of Rome, Venice, etc. (Dorothy McGuire, Clifton Webb, Jean Peters; director, Jean Negulesco.)
- \*\*YOUNG LOVERS, THE** (*G.F.D.*) An American embassy employee falls in love with a girl from an Iron Curtain country; Anthony Asquith's direction is sympathetic, and there is a gentle, appealing performance by Odile Versois. *Reviewed.* (David Knight, David Kossoff.)



# SIGHT AND SOUND

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REPUBLIC PICTURES for *Thursday's Children*.  
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PLATO FILMS for *The Childhood of Maxim Gorki*.  
LUX FILMS for *Senso*.  
TITANUS for *Pane, Amore e Fantasia*.  
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SHOCHIKU COMPANY for *The Idiot*, *Squalor*.  
TOHO COMPANY for *Drunken Angel*, *Woman of Shanghai*, *Sword for Hire*.  
PLANET NEWS for *The French Line*.



### **"NURBURGRING"**

This 15-minute film★ was made in Germany but has an English commentary spoken by Nevil Lloyd. It was made to celebrate the Jubilee of Nurburgring and records twenty-five years of motor racing on the famous German track.

The film shows the driving technique of many of the great pre-war aces—Nuvolari, Carraciola, von Brauchitsch, Seaman, Lang, Stuck and Hasse, as well as more recent champions like Fangio, Ascari and Farina.

There are many thrilling moments in this record of motor racing from 1927-1952.

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## Europe and the Far East

The two most important developments in the cinema since the war have been, arguably, the neo-realist movement in Italy and the discovery by the West—a partial discovery, as yet—of the Japanese cinema. Neo-realism has exerted its influence; and, nine years after the end of the war, it appears, if not dead, at least considerably less vigorous than it was four or five years ago. An article in *Time* recently commented that “*The finest hour of the Italian cinema was rung in with Open City (1946) and tolled out with Umberto D. (1952), and every man of talent in the Italian movie industry knows it. . . . Neo-realism has died at the box-office, and the Italian Government has written its epitaph with the charge that it performed ‘a very bad service to [the] country’.*” This may be somewhat to over-state the case, but undoubtedly the commercial and fashionable success which has made possible the very considerable post-war expansion of the Italian film industry has demanded its price. “*A new and powerful Hollywood,*” says *Time*, “*has risen to challenge the old*”: in taking on Hollywood, the Italian film industry has inevitably to some extent “gone Hollywood.”

In the cinema, however, there seems always to be one country, as it were, in the lead; in the 'twenties it was first Germany, then Russia; in the 'thirties it was France; during the war it was Britain and since the war it has been Italy. Now, as Gavin Lambert commented in the last issue of SIGHT AND SOUND, “*one begins to suspect that more good films are being made at the moment in Japan than in any other country.*” We cannot, for the time being, do very much more than suspect. Only four Japanese films have so far been shown in London (Kurosawa's *Rashomon* and *Tora-no-o*, Kinugasa's *The Gate of Hell*, and the less significant, though attractive, *The Impostor*); at the European festivals it has been possible to see several more historical dramas (*The Tale of Genji*, *Ugetsu Monegataru*, *The Life of O'Haru*), and at the Berlin Festival both in 1953 and in 1954 the Japanese have shown films with contemporary settings (Gosho's *Four Chimneys* and Kurosawa's *Living*). All this, however, amounts only to a tiny sample of the total Japanese output. And, as far as this country is concerned, we have been restricted to period films, to works drawn from legend, from the traditions of the Noh play and the Kabuki theatre. It is certainly understandable that British distributors should feel cautious about presenting such pictures as Kurosawa's *Drunken Angel* or *Living*. Where the whole idiom is strange, they may well conclude—rightly or wrongly—that it will prove more acceptable in the costume picture than in the film with a modern setting. In any case, any exhibitor showing a Japanese film is clearly taking a very considerable gamble: it would be naïve to imagine that, however impressive the Japanese productions may be, they would ever be shown as widely as the French or the Italian.

In films, as in other things, Japan has shown her aptitude for copying Western models: von Sternberg and Murnau, according to Jay Leyda, have been particularly admired and imitated. Films from other Eastern countries, from India or from Hong Kong, are likely to appear even more alien to the British public. The frequent interruptions for song and dance interludes in the Indian films, for instance, are bound to prove an obstacle with any Western audience unless the pictures are very extensively cut. In fact, the Indian *Aan* was popular, though largely one suspects on the strength of its energy and novelty value; the single Hong Kong production shown in London, *Forbidden City*, proved, however, a disappointingly flat piece of period reconstruction. Other Indian films have been shown at the festivals and privately in Britain; films from Communist China have their place in some Film Society programmes, if not in the cinemas. Again, curiosity is awakened rather than satisfied, and again we can scarcely criticise distributors for a reluctance to take risks with films whose main interest, except in a few rare cases, lies in their remoteness from our own idiom. Someone, however, might take a chance with the Indian *Two Acres of Land*, modelled on *Bicycle Thieves* and able to stand up to the comparison.

To the Japanese films, though, we are bound to return. There can be few serious critics in the West who do not regret their inability to see more, for instance, of the work of Kurosawa (who owes his reputation to his studies of contemporary life rather than to his period films) and of Kinugasa, whose *Gate of Hell* indicated a major talent. The great Russian films were introduced to Britain by the Film Society, and it is to be hoped that practical difficulties will not long prevent similar non-commercial showings of the work of these and other directors. And it would surely be to the advantage not only of the British film press and public, but to that of Japan herself, if a festival comparable to those held by the French and the Italians could be arranged in the not too distant future.

## IN THE PICTURE

### VENICE

This year's Festival, which marked the return of its pre-war director, Ottavio Croze, had something rare in occasions of its kind: a high general level of entries. Few programmes were completely unrewarding, and some of the double features—all competing films were shown in this way—provided almost an *embarras de richesse*. (And one isn't, perhaps, at one's best for a master-work at one o'clock in the morning.) A more relaxing atmosphere, with less emphasis on galas, starlets and publicity stunting, was another thing to be grateful for, and one can only regret that a few countries, notably the U.S.S.R., did not participate this year.

Japanese films have tended to dominate festivals since the triumph of *Rashomon*, and once again they made the deepest impression, winning two out of the four Silver Lions with their engrossing costume pieces set in the disturbed, ferocious middle ages. *Sansho Dayu*, directed by Kenji Mizoguchi (whose *Ugetsu Monogetari* won a prize here last year), is a characteristic combination of history and legend, sweepingly told and yet full of intimacy and tenderness. The kidnapping of two well-born children, who are sent into appalling slavery, is the first episode of a picaresque folk tale that illuminates many aspects of feudal life in the period; rich in observation and detail, it shows that Mizoguchi is one of the cinema's few real poets.

Akira Kurosawa is a brilliant artist in prose. His *The Seven Samurai*, which tells of a peasant village saved from marauding bandits by a group of warriors, is an adventure story of the best kind. As in *Rashomon*, one has the feeling of a modern eye looking back into the past, which is less re-created than evoked. There is much virtuosity in the handling (notably the rapid travelling shots), and hardly an image in the film which, like Mizoguchi's, is over two hours long, that does not seem freshly, excitingly composed. But it has the limitations as well as the virtues of brilliance, and for this reason is less satisfying than *Sansho Dayu*.

The third Japanese film, *A Hotel at Osaka*, was the last to be made by Heinosuke Gosho (who directed *Four Chimneys*) before his death. Gosho has always specialised in contemporary stories and here, adapting a well-known novel by Minakami, he gives a cross-section of life in an industrial city entirely through the residents and servants of a small hotel. Not a great deal happens; most of the characters are unfulfilled, through poverty, loneliness, uncertainty, and their lives converge, intersect and separate again. "Life goes on and we must make the best of it" is the only conclusion, and it is most beautifully, humanely and fittingly reached.

The Grand Prix winner, *Romeo and Juliet* (Golden Lion), appeals above all by its sumptuous visual surface. Robert Krasker's Technicolor photography of Verona and Mantua is, in the style of paintings brought to life, flawlessly done. How



"A Hotel at Osaka": Heinosuke Gosho's last film, shown at the Venice Festival, is a study of life in post-war Japan.

far Castellani succeeds in filming Shakespeare is a more arguable matter. The acting and speaking are not very distinguished, and Laurence Harvey's Romeo lacks grace and passion; the textual cutting, particularly of Mercutio's part, is sometimes ill-judged; and one wonders whether there is not, in fact, something academic about the whole approach. But the film is certainly, as its reception proved, a considerable and controversial attempt. Originally, Britain was represented only by the agreeable *Father Brown*; and there is no doubt that when the Rank Organisation, halfway through the Festival, acceded to the invitation to send *Romeo and Juliet*, it did much to raise the level of British prestige.

*Senso* also shows an Italian director, Visconti, attempting a costume film in colour for the first time. Set in Venice in the 1860's, it places a doomed, tragic love affair between an Italian countess (Valli) and a dissolute Austrian officer (Farley Granger) against the stirrings of the Lombardo-Veneto conspirators and a national struggle for liberty. The colour (Krasker again) and decoration display high aristocratic taste, and make a curious contrast with the film's evident revolutionary sympathies. Due to Granger's inadequate performance and the flat characterisation of the conspirators, the film seems, finally, rather unreal, but as an exercise in period construction it is certainly original and brilliant. Fellini's *La Strada* (Silver Lion) is an aggravatingly tentative and pseudo-Chaplinesque story of two travelling entertainers.

From France, Becker's *Touchez Pas au Grisbi*, which won Gabin the acting prize, is an adeptly realised drama of the Paris underworld, similar in its overlaying of convention with a busy, clever surface to Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (Silver Lion). As for *L'Air de Paris*, it is sad nowadays to write about a Carné film; one can only say that this story of a young boxer's rise to fame is carefully made and, in its loss of contact with contemporary life, fairly absurd.

For the rest, there were some bloodthirsty Latin American entries, full of beautifully photographed rape, torture, etc., including a made-to-order Bunuel, *Death and the River*. The best Mexican film, *Raíces* (*Roots*), was not officially entered; its four sketches of Mexican peasant life, though uneven, show at their best a definite, original talent in the making. Likewise, the official Spanish entry was a bloated biblical reconstruction, but *Felicia Pasquales* by J. A. Bardem (whose *Comicos* was admired at Cannes) was shown *hors concours*. A kind of Spanish *Antoine et Antoinette*, its material is too thin, but there is an often attractive response to character.

Of the shorts, *The Arrest*, made by Luigi de Gianni at the Centro Sperimentale with fellow students there, is worth mention for its attempt to bring Kafka (it is based on the first chapter of *The Trial*) to the screen. It is too undramatic, but does at times authentically catch the atmosphere of its original.

GAVIN LAMBERT.



"Riot in Cell Block II": Neville Brand (centre, holding telephone) plays the leader of the prison rioters in this Walter Wanger production.





Edinburgh entry: made independently by Lindsay Anderson and Guy Brenton, with a commentary spoken by Richard Burton, "Thursday's Children" is a lively and sensitively observed account of teaching methods and spare-time activities in a school for deaf and dumb children.

## EDINBURGH

Dour Edinburgh wore a smile for the Festival this year. It was, of course, impossible not to be a little gay with the programme of Diaghilev ballets at the Empire, with Richard Buckle's gilded cock fronting you at every street corner (often juxtaposed with posters advertising a "Chicken Comes to Town" Exhibition), and with a late night revue in every available cellar or parish hall. The Film Festival, too, seemed lighter of heart. The standard of the entry was generally much improved on last year's; the number of feature films was greater, the sermons fewer. This year's Festival visitors, too, had an undeniable glamour, whether they were loved and homely faces like Michael Redgrave and Anthony Asquith, or exotic strangers like Helle Lambetti, Walter Wanger, Joan Bennett, John Huston and Michael Yannis. Cavalcanti's return to Britain after five years' absence was a fine festive occasion.

The lighter tone was confirmed by the opening film—Michael Yannis's *Windfall in Athens*. This work was greatly praised for its zest and elation, and promises well for its director—who worked in this country for some time, both in the cinema and the theatre.

Inevitably, most of the features were concerned with social comment. The best all-rounder was certainly *Riot in Cell Block 11*, produced by Walter Wanger, and directed by Don Siegel. Siegel here shows himself to have a considerable mastery of character and narrative. The film is a level, argued, yet highly strung and forceful study of prison problems, describing how both prisoners and harassed, dependent executives are at the mercy of an impotent, impersonal administration.

*Salt of the Earth* sets out to show the progress of a miners' strike in New Mexico, side by side with the emancipation of the wives of the strikers. It is not an elegant film, but it has form, humour, and a number of performances which are much to be admired. Its truth and humanity were not often equalled in the rest of the Festival programme. It was received with particular enthusiasm; probably owing to favourable comparison with a film on a similar theme, shown two days before—the Argentinian *Dark River*, a film of energy and some style, but offensive in its brutality. Two films dealt with the problems of juvenile delinquency—the Polish *Five Boys From Barska Street* and André Cayatte's *Avant le Deluge*, a piece as generally condemned for its artifice as praised for its slickness. The lighter side of child life was offered by *The Little Fugitive* (seen last year at Venice) and a Russian virtuoso display of child direction, *Chuk and Gek*. The exceptional audience for this film was an almost frightening demonstration of the way in which the prefatory television programme, "Films at Edinburgh," can determine in advance reactions to the Festival programme. A short story film, *A*

"Ballet Girl": produced and written by Bjarne Henning-Jensen and directed by Astrid Henning-Jensen, this film about the ballet school at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen was shown at the Edinburgh Festival.

*Time Out of War*, directed by Terence and Denis Saunders, received great praise. It tells of a private truce, for a hot afternoon, between two Northern soldiers in the American Civil War, and a Southerner; and has been described by one critic as "the best war film since Birth of a Nation."

"Pure documentary" was mostly represented by a younger generation. The older fathers of British Documentary appeared on this year's credit titles only as producers—John Grierson of Group 3's *Man of Africa*, Paul Rotha of the rapidly improving product of the B.B.C. Television Documentary Unit, and Edgar Anstey of British Transport Films. Among the most worth-while representatives of the straightforward documentary style were two items almost overlooked. Telediffusion Francaise's *Lumière* is inevitably overshadowed by Franju's *Le Grand Méliès*, in the same series; but Paul Paviot's imaginative assembly of remote material, Kosma's witty score and the intelligent and moving commentary by Abel Gance deserve respect. *Thursday's Children*, directed by Guy Brenton and Lindsay Anderson, is remarkable not only for the astonishing intimacy with which the camera has caught the deaf children who are the subject of the film, but also for the force of its feeling; it is impossible to escape the warmth of the love and baffled indignation which the directors convey.

As usual, impressionist experiments attracted most attention. Herman van der Horst's *Lekko* is an excellent film, reminiscent of the adventures of the early British school, and displaying all the qualities of *Houen Zol*, but now matured and controlled. *Jazz Dance*, a cleverly photographed and edited record of a jam session, attracted more interest than, perhaps, it merited. It shares with *In the Sun's Reflected Rays* (a Yugoslav experiment) the power of inducing giddiness, if not nausea.

In numbers, at least, art films and dance films were in the ascendant this year. The dance films were mostly plain records. (An exception was the Henning-Jensens' *Ballet Girl*, a film of elegance, marred by the English commentary.) Of the art films, John Read's *Walter Sickert—Painter of the First Floor Back* (rather, a documentary on an art subject) was perhaps the best, and is certainly an improvement on the deification of *Graham Sutherland*, also produced by the B.B.C. Television Service. This year's Festival was not strong in animated films, but there was Jiri Trnka's fine *A Gold Fish*.

Finally, two oases of flesh and blood among all the celluloid. Michael Redgrave's lecture "I Am Not a Camera" was a scholarly, stimulating, fascinating thesis, unexpectedly taking in its sweep a masterly survey of the entire field of the cinema. Anthony Asquith's British Film Academy Annual Celebrity Lecture (the first) was gay, personal and shrewd.

This year for the first time the Edinburgh Film Festival took for its theme "The Living Cinema." And there were new directors and new films sufficient to settle conclusively the needless and embarrassing arguments on whether the film (or Movie, as it is known among the Scots) is dead. It lives; and can even laugh.

DAVID ROBINSON.







Julie Harris and James Dean in a scene from Elia Kazan's "East of Eden" based on the novel by John Steinbeck.

### New Systems

Paramount's claim that VistaVision offers better picture quality than any other wide-screen technique seemed justified at the first London demonstration, held some months ago. Briefly, the system is as follows: the VistaVision camera uses ordinary 35 mm. negative film, but exposes the negative horizontally to take frames two-and-a-half times the usual size; a standard print is then obtained by optical reduction, thus reducing the graininess of the image.

There is no fixed screen ratio for VistaVision. It can be shown from the "old" ratio of 1.33:1 to the near-CinemaScope proportion of 2:1 and, though Paramount recommend a 1.85:1 ratio, the company is not imposing any limitations on exhibitors who adopt the system. Stereophonic sound is also recommended, although it was not used at the demonstration. In fact, Paramount ask only that the largest possible screens are installed where VistaVision is used. As the system needs no new projection equipment, it will probably prove more popular with many exhibitors than CinemaScope, which involves expensive adaptation. Already, Mr. Rank has announced that he will not equip any more of his cinemas with CinemaScope, and his studios are turning over to VistaVision production.

Paramount's representatives emphasised at the demonstration that they realised VistaVision was no more than the best possible picture frame, but assured us—with frequent references to De Mille's current production, *The Ten Commandments*—that it would soon be filled by the best possible pictures. In fact, the width of the 45 ft. screen seemed unremarkable, but the height, 24 ft., made the pictures more comfortable to watch. It was unfortunate that the first film shown falsified the comparative sizes of the other systems. "Remember the old keyhole screen?" asked the commentator as a picture about 8 ft. by 6 ft. appeared in the centre of the screen. "Remember those annoying close-ups that had to be cut in so we could recognise the stars?"

As VistaVision on a large 1.33:1 screen will only give audiences the sensation of being a dozen or so rows nearer than usual to a normal film of improved photographic quality, this sudden distaste for "oldies" and "smallies" seems somewhat harsh. VistaVision's greatest asset is undoubtedly the improvement in clarity, in the sharpness of the picture from foreground to distance. Its most obvious drawback would appear to arise from the uncertain screen ratio. According to Paramount, cameramen are instructed to compose for a 1.66:1 picture sufficiently "loose" to allow for screening from 1.33:1 to 2:1. Backgrounds, it seems, will be vague enough

to permit exhibitors to slice the picture down to their own requirements.

Meanwhile, a 20th Century-Fox demonstration of "the advancing techniques of CinemaScope" laid emphasis equally on sound effects (with a reverberating roll of thunder in "4-track high-fidelity magnetic stereophonic sound") and on improved picture quality. Brief extracts from forthcoming productions such as *The Egyptian*, a massive costume orgy, *There's No Business Like Show Business*, an Ethel Merman musical, and *Untamed*, featuring Zulus and covered wagons in South Africa, indicated the considerable improvement in the sharpness and depth of focus achieved by the newly developed lenses. Again, a comparison with the ordinary screen shape showed it to be unnecessary disadvantage. And Darryl F. Zanuck, filmed in a booklined office and introducing the excerpts rather in the manner of a high-pressure salesman confident that he has found a buyer, used the occasion to outline Fox's all-CinemaScope, all-colour programme, which includes the filming of numerous best-sellers.

Cinerama, the widest of the wide screen systems—it in fact employs a triple screen—will be on show at the London Casino by the time this issue appears. Eighteen months ago, after a visit to New York, Gavin Lambert commented that, "the programme undoubtedly succeeds in its main object, which is to prove that the projection of greatly magnified images on to a curved screen produces a unique effect of actuality, of 'being there' . . . the great discovery of Cinerama is liberation from the frame." The box-office success of *This is Cinerama* has been phenomenal: it remains, however, a "stunt" attraction rather than a regular competitor with VistaVision, CinemaScope and the ordinary screen, and to date projects for a narrative film in Cinerama seem not to have advanced beyond the planning stage. For once, though, the biggest seems really the best.

### New Venture

A promising new project, modest in scope but brave in intention, is *Stolen Journey*, the first feature film to be undertaken by a young, independent British unit, Harlequin Films. At last year's Venice Festival, the Grand Prix for shorts was unexpectedly scooped by this company's first picture, *Sunday by the Sea*, directed by Anthony Simmons, produced by Leon Clore (whose Countryman Films was responsible for the production of *Conquest of Everest*) and photographed by Walter Lassally. John Arnold, formerly an assistant director, has joined them, directing *Stolen Journey* and collaborating with Simmons on the script. The casting is unconventional, with



two relatively little-known young players—Diane Cilento and Lee Patterson—taking the leading parts.

The makers of *Stolen Journey* are anxious that their film should not be inflated to appear more pretentious than in fact it is. Set mainly in a truck-drivers' café and in the London docks, the picture is conceived as a second feature, a romantic melodrama to be made extremely cheaply, carefully designed to satisfy distributors and exhibitors to whom experiment may be a dangerous word. But it aims to fulfil its function respectably, with characterisation and atmosphere above the average, and a technical finish superior to that of most films budgeted so low. From here, Harlequin hope to go on more adventurously. And certainly, from the nexus of talents that are going to make *Stolen Journey*, interesting developments may well be expected.

### Italian Notes

ROBERT HAWKINS writes: Confusion and uncertainty over re-approval and wording of a new protective film legislation, which for most Italian productions means the difference between profit and loss, has somewhat delayed the usual seasonal production spurt. Now, after some reassurance by the Government that the protective factors will be retained, things are getting off to a slow start, with some production plans being announced.

Leading off current activity is Luigi Comencini's *Pane, Amore e Gelosia*, inevitable follow-up to his successful *Pane, Amore e Fantasia*. De Sica and Gina Lollobrigida are *vis-à-vis* again in the sequel, also written by Ettore Margadonna. By contract, de Sica again supervises the acting. Lattuada is set to start work on *Scuola Elementare*, a Franco-Italian co-production to be shot mainly in Milan. Emmer has almost finished another lightweight item, *Camilla*, while in the Po River delta, Mario Soldati is directing Sofia Loren in *La Donna del Fiume*. In the planning stage: de Sica-Zavattini, teamed once more on *Il Tetto* (*The Roof*), now being scripted, for de Sica's direction.

But, so far, the bulk of activity has been in the hands of "foreign" talent, which has filled Italian studios and locations. With Robert Rossen's *Mambo* (Silvana Mangano, Shelley Winters, Vittorio Gassman, Michael Rennie and Katherine Dunham) awaiting release, two other Hollywood directors are busy in Rome on two improbable epics: Robert Wise directs Rossana Podesta, Jacques Sernas, Sir Cedric Hardwicke in *Helen of Troy*, and Howard Hawks is faced with *Land of the Pharaohs*, starring Jack Hawkins, Joan Collins. Both, with the usual cast of thousands and an impressive use of sets, spears and armour, are for Warners release. Lewis Milestone is to start work soon on *The Black Widow*, with Patricia Roc; David Lean is in Venice, directing Katharine Hepburn in *Time of the Cuckoo*, from the Arthur Laurents play; and Mel Ferrer has arrived to star in *Proibito*, from Grazia Deledda's novel, to be filmed in Sardinia by Mario Monicelli.



"Stolen Journey": Diane Cilento and Lee Patterson.

### Work in Progress

#### Great Britain

Laurence Olivier: *Richard III*, to be filmed partly in Spain, with Olivier himself as Richard, John Gielgud as Clarence. Anthony Asquith: *Carrington V.C.*, from the play about an army court martial, with David Niven.

Robert Hamer: *To Paris With Love*, a romantic comedy starring Alec Guinness and Odile Versois.

Henry Cornelius: *I Am a Camera*, from John van Druten's stage adaptation of the Christopher Isherwood stories. Julie Harris, who played the part on Broadway, will be Sally Bowles.

#### U.S.A.

William Wyler: a melodrama, *The Desperate Hours*, about three escaped convicts who terrorise a midwestern family. Humphrey Bogart plays the leading convict.

Daniel Mann: *The Rose Tattoo*, from the Tennessee Williams play, with Anna Magnani.

Charles Laughton: *The Night of the Hunter*, from a novel by Davis Grubb, with Robert Mitchum, Shelley Winters and, in her first screen part for some years, Lillian Gish.

Charles Walters: *The Glass Slipper*, based on Herbert and Eleanor Farjeon's stage musical version of Cinderella, and starring Leslie Caron, Roland Petit and Michael Wilding.

#### France

Jean Renoir: *French Can Can*, a costume drama, in colour, with Jean Gabin and Francoise Arnoul.

Max Ophuls: *La Vie Extraordinaire de Lola Montez*, with Ludmilla Tcherina.

#### Denmark

Karl Dreyer: a film based on *Ordet* (*The Word*) by Kaj Munk, the Danish dramatist-priest killed by the Germans during the war.

Adrienne Corri, Ernest Thesiger and Peter Finch in "Make Me an Offer." This Group 3 production, directed by Cyril Frankel, is based on Wolf Mankowitz's story about collectors, antique dealers and the search for a valuable Wedgwood vase.



Carol Reed's "The Third Man": a triumph for the *metteur en scène*.

## THE METTEUR EN SCÈNE

Tony Richardson

WHETHER any distinction can be made between the interpretative and the creative is a tricky critical problem. Nevertheless, while recognising that to distinguish between them is, probably, ultimately invalid, and that the real difference is one of degree rather than kind, the terms indicate, at least, certain emphases which makes it possible to use them as rough working concepts. Their very looseness is, if anything, a help to my purposes, for the area which I am surveying cannot be precisely mapped and the elements can almost always be found existing side by side, and even impinging on each other. On the one hand, to be more specific then, we have the Eisensteins, the Vigos, the de Sicas, who have completely absorbed, dominated their material and sea-changed it into an artistic whole; and on the other, at its best, the Wylers, the Stevens, the Hustons, the interpreters who have translated their material professionally into cinematic terms but have not transformed it. This is, necessarily, a wild over-simplification. Values and responses are as implicit in *The Robe* as in *Shane* as in *October*. Nor are the categories static. They expand, contract, overlap as a subject produces a richer or more personal response. We see a more "creative" Huston in *The Asphalt Jungle* than in *The African Queen*. But as a simplification this works as well as most.

There is, however, a third group of directors who are midway between the other two: it is about these that I want to write, and for the purposes of this article I am

calling them the *metteurs en scène*. The term as we shall see is exact. The essential characteristic of all of them is the disparity between what they are saying and how they are saying it. They are not content—or not able—like the true interpreter to submerge their personalities in the job of putting whatever they are tackling on to the screen. They must "do something with" their material and the means become the ends. (In some ways it is similar to the traditional distinction between form and content. But form has a more specific meaning and it can be used, as can style, by the *metteur en scène* for his own purposes.) Inevitably with this goes a certain—to call it staginess has the wrong connotations—but a certain self-consciousness. The particular elements in which this is manifest vary widely. It may be the décor, the staging, the editing, the photography; it may be in the basic attitudes and feelings the director has about his subject; it may be in his certainty of manipulating the responses of his audience: but in all of them is this consciousness of their own presentation.

Judging by absolute standards, the *metteur en scène's* work is ultimately bad. Schizophrenia works better in life than in art, and however clever the *metteur en scène* is in decorating and enlivening the surface, he is bound to be corrupted by the material he is presenting if that is false and conventional. Indeed, it is in most cases all too obvious that he is identified with it. But it is too easy critically to expose the bare and creaky structure behind the façade; the façade, like the front of a Plateresque cathedral, may have a good deal of interest in itself, and value, too, even if this is limited by the larger gesture the work makes as a whole. Besides, down to the last detail of carving, the same principles obtain as in the structure of the whole building, and it is just as possible for the details to be fresh and genuine as it is for them to be glib and sham.

To make my definition clearer and to show how wide and fluctuating is the area I want to cover, it is best to look at two examples. It must be stressed, however, that one cannot confine any artist rigidly to this any more than to other such categories. Milestone, for example, has created two films which are utterly personal expressions of feeling, but his ordinary work has no more sign of a distinct personality than Stevens' has. Similarly, when a subject fails to engage an artist's real interest, he can concentrate on detail or on stylistic exercises in the way of the *metteur en scène* proper.

The de Sica-Selznick film *Indiscretion* is a perfect example of this, and we can see exactly the emphasis with which I am dealing by referring it to de Sica's other films. In cold description, it might seem very like them. Two young Americans in Italy have met and fallen in love. The girl is torn between her affection and her sense of responsibility to her husband and child in the States, and the film tells the story of that conflict telescoped into her last hours in Rome, as she wavers between taking a train back to America and staying with her lover. The great station in Rome was to act as setting and symbol of the brief affair. In idea certainly this seemed promising in de Sica's hand. It is quite clear, even in the mutilated version shown here, that the treatment never fulfilled that promise. For whatever reason, perhaps in de Sica's failure to get inside people of a race not his own, perhaps in his realisation of the inadequacy of



Jennifer Jones' performance, his interest seems entirely in the details, the trappings. Hearty Frenchmen singing in chorus, a gesturing crocodile of deaf and dumb children, a middle-aged wolf aimlessly trying to pick up women passing by, are brilliantly noted. But, unlike the incidentals in *Bicycle Thieves*, they do not advance the dramatic action in any way. Jennifer Jones helps a sick woman to the first aid station and buys chocolate for her waiting children, but the incident has no bearing on her development or on that of the plot. And as often happens when the core is missing, the details go soft too. The miraculous tact, the refusal to make the explicit comment, which makes *Umberto D.* so astonishing and so daring are forgotten; the director's responses are all too slick and obvious. Marvellously as he handles the three boys eating their chocolate, the emotional comment is too consciously exploited.

In Becker's *Casque d'Or* we find another sort of *mise en scène*. Becker's other films have shown him as an agreeable enough director of no great distinction, with a warmth and freshness of his own. Here he attempts a conventional melodrama set in Impressionist Paris. *Casque d'Or* is the cinema at its most efficient. From the first moment when the lovers, a carpenter and a prostitute, casually meet, to the final drop of the guillotine before the horrified Signoret's eyes, everything is exactly and precisely calculated for its effect value. On that level it is completely successful. Its essential vulgarity emerges only when we see just how conscious of its effect it is. The period re-creation is authentic: the boating party, the open air café by the river, the billiards saloon, the embroidered waistcoats, the elaborate hair styles, the "casques" of the girls. But when we compare this with the period sense of the Gorki films or Renoir's *Partie de Campagne*, we see how obvious the references (to the painters, for instance) are. In the latter films, the setting, so seemingly artless and casual, is the beginning from which they start and which they forget: in *Casque d'Or* it is the end. In fact, there are signs enough that Becker takes his own cleverness too seriously, that his glossy setting has so convinced him that he accepts as "real" such absurd conventions as his own gangsters whose intuition is so keen and fine that they foresee every move before it is made without a word spoken (this is a stock convention of the French "Toughie" school: compare Clouzot and Allegret), and even as tragic the outcome of the whole affaire. Perhaps, however, this is unfairly to read into Becker's film a bigger claim than he would in fact make for it. But there is a heaviness of purpose in the film which, combined with what Roger Fry would call its Bond Street quality, makes it for me much less enjoyable than the work of Max Ophüls, another *metteur en scène* with a taste for period re-creation.

Technical resourcefulness such as Becker's is something all the *metteurs en scène* have in common. Technique, and the effects they can produce by it, is one of their main preoccupations, to a larger extent sometimes than with far greater artists. Cocteau said: "to a Dreyer the technique of a Bunuel must seem mediocre, as if, in 1912, a painter had demanded that Picasso should copy newsprint in order to deceive the eye, instead of sticking newsprint to his canvas." Because of this, they have often

Jacques Becker's "Casque d'Or": "... the cinema at its most efficient."

been responsible for the development of certain mechanical innovations which have proved of great value. Lang and Murnau, for instance, were the first people to make extensive use of cameras mounted on dollies.

The German cinema as a whole is very apposite to our purposes. Alone of the various national traditions in the cinema, it was directly influenced by the theatre. The American film had none but the sketchiest theatre traditions to which to refer; and the Russians realised quite consciously the differences between the two media. Eisenstein turned to the cinema after experimental work in the theatre (culminating in his staging of Tretiakov's play *Gas Masks* in a real gas factory with the workers themselves as players), because he realised he could achieve there the reality which the inevitable limitations of the theatre denied him. The Germans, however, merely transferred the experiments they were then making in the theatre to the screen, with the stylised acting, the use of popular art motifs, the exaggerated expressionist sets and costumes. The fashionable stage designer Andrei Andreyev designed for the cinema (*Raskolnikov*), and the Moscow Arts Company (whose work it must be remembered was not at that time confined to the naturalistic acting Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko had developed) were used as players.

One must admit, of course, that films like *Caligari* recognised that the cinema could be more than a recorder of fact, and that was important for the time, though the films of Griffith and Chaplin had acknowledged the fact too. It is true also that the German cinema did not pursue the extreme crudity of experiments like *Caligari*, that it realised that the cinematic approach is naturalistic. Nevertheless, the basic method behind *The Last Laugh* or later films like *The Blue Angel* is exactly the same as it is behind *Caligari*: an attempt to communicate a "reality" more intense than naturalism allowed by theatrical effects. In the light of the attitudes behind the films of Wiene, Murnau, Lang, von Sternberg, attitudes paralleled to a greater or lesser hideousness of taste, the subsequent political history of Germany becomes all too





Comparison and contrast: left, Gosta Ekman and Emil Jannings in Murnau's "Faust," a characteristic example of German Expressionism; right, Eisenstein's "Battleship Potemkin."

understandable. Like Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, the German cinema (G. W. Pabst excepted), is, viewed today, a grim monument to the fate of the *metteur en scène*.

The German cinema's intimate connection with the theatre is paralleled in the careers of many of the individuals I shall discuss. Seen in the perspective of the contemporary theatre, this is not surprising. During the early years of the cinema's development the theatre was rediscovering its traditions. All the great directors—Stanislavsky, Copeau, Reinhardt, Granville Barker, Craig, Appia—were in one way or another overthrowing the debased and melodramatic stage practice of the nineteenth century, either by a new naturalism or by finding a modern equivalent to the methods of the classical theatre. In principle at any rate they succeeded. The intensely experimental state of the theatre in the early twentieth century was followed by a new traditionalism which has its own limitations for the director.

It was natural therefore that many directors should turn to the cinema with its freer scope. But, too often, they found there merely a much more potent and effective means of exploiting and playing on stock attitudes and feelings in their audiences, and we shall find that the life, energy and value of their work is in direct ratio to the extent to which this is their conscious aim. (Or, of course, the extent to which they are working up the feeling consciously in themselves.) Carné is a perfect example of the latter tendencies. At his best, in *Le Jour se Lève* and *Quai des Brumes*, he succeeds better than anyone in the communication of a romantic, vaguely Destined mood. Melancholy, sadness, a sense of frustration and parting hang over his foggy stations, his misty chimneys, his scented hothouses. Everything contributes to the effect—the long, slow dissolves, the artily angled photography. But we understand by how narrow a margin they succeed when we compare these films with *Hôtel du Nord* and, to a lesser extent, *Les Enfants du Paradis*. The first tracking shot along the arched bridge on the

*quai* in the former, with its attempt to give the same sense of heaviness and doom, the whole conception of the pierrot in the latter, are all too contrived. It is almost as if the other films were in tune to some common contemporary mood which they were not able to recapture. This is not uncommon with certain minor romantic works of art. Caravaggio and Ossian—on different levels—are similar cases.

Carné is another reminder that the seeming predominance of the *metteur en scène* in our cinema is not a unique phenomenon. Sooner or later oblivion is the price of the fashionable. But it is time to look at some of the individuals themselves.

## II

Of all of them, Max Ophüls is the most glamorous. His films, *Liebelei*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, *La Ronde*, *Le Plaisir*, *Madame De . . .*, are all romantic, décoriste pictures of society in the final decades of the last century. His people are only shadows, conventional shadows playing a bittersweet game of heartbreak. What matters is the world in which they play it, a glistening world of chandeliers and carriages, of tiaras and necklaces, of fur wraps and satin gowns, of remembered waltzes and forgotten champagne, of Liszt and frou-frou, of brilliant sad evenings and duels in a cold dawn. No matter what the material he is handling, Ophüls transforms it. In *La Ronde* we find Schnitzler's harshness softened until it is almost unrecognisable; and to look for de Maupassant in *La Maison de Madame Tellier* is absurd. The provincial Norman tarts have become Viennese glamour girls: the interior of the village church is festooned with the most delicate and fanciful of rococo. But as the camera glides over the carving or follows the laughing cartload through the country, captivation is complete. In the face of such visual sophistication other criteria disappear. Sequence after sequence returns in all its nostalgic glitter and loveliness—the breathtaking rush to the Moulin Rouge, Madame De's letter torn into shreds and dissolving to snowflakes outside her carriage window, Jourdan



and Fontaine swaying together in the deserted fairground. The decoration is elaborated and elaborated; the camera glides and circles; if Ophuls can shoot through, behind or round something, he will; he oversteps every mark, except that of taste. He is the most sophisticated and magic of window-dressers.

Luchino Visconti shares with Ophuls extreme visual fastidiousness. Of his films (*Osessione*, *La Terra Trema*, *Bellissima*, *Senso*) I have seen only the first and third, but both have visually a common style, a balancing of almost every shot with tiny flickering points of light and movement—traffic moving in the distance, washing flapping, water glittering. Movement which is for Ophuls slow, rounded and graceful is for Visconti quick, darting, hectic. Unlike Ophuls, too, Visconti's films attempt to deal with modern life directly. *La Terra Trema* tells the story of a group of poor Sicilian fishermen, *Osessione* of an affair between a truck driver and the wife of the owner of a transport café, *Bellissima* of a mother grooming her child for a film audition. Both the two I have seen are novelettish in their approach to character and situation. There is easy pathos and there are pat ironies (the crash of the lorry, the final acceptance of the child after the production staff have roared with laughter when she breaks down during the test); certain scenes, such as the seduction in *Osessione*, are exploited for their sensation value. But these are all offset by the constant flow of invention. Indeed the invention is so fertile that it counteracts the very tensions and atmospheres that Visconti is building up. He cannot resist adding the details of movement—a crowd watching a barker, huge carnival models being wheeled across a square, girls posing in a photographer's studio—that take our attention and make all sorts of points but none connected with the scene. Some of the invention is apt, some silly, but it is always entertaining and rarely vulgar. Visconti has observed and noted the surface of life well, but when he comes to re-create it in all its casualness he can only give us the cleverest and most charming stage version.

All that is potentially vulgar in Visconti we can see



Vivien Leigh in "A Streetcar Named Desire": Kazan employed "a deliberate, vague romanticism."

in the American director Elia Kazan. Like Visconti he was stage producer before he was film director, and his first film, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, shows how essentially theatrical his imagination still was. (It is interesting to compare it with Peter Brook's *Beggar's Opera*.) He progressed, however, through films such as *Boomerang* and *Gentleman's Agreement* to *Panic in the Streets*, a first-class thriller where his grasp of cinematic means, though restrained, is complete. Unfortunately—as anyone who saw his empty but showy stage production of *Death of a Salesman* might have feared—Kazan was not content with this relative self-effacement and became fascinated with his own cleverness. His later films like *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Viva Zapata* and *On the Waterfront* are ostentatious displays of shock tactics and technical tricks. The style used is different in each—in *Streetcar* a deliberate, vague romanticism of drifting music, waving scrim curtains and soft focus photography, in *Zapata* carefully balanced and contrasting picturesque compositions with flashy cross cutting, and in *On the Waterfront* theatrical playing (Brando excepted) and stagy photographic angles—but each is coldly playing for obvious effects and responses. It is the pretentiousness of the material which makes Kazan's films so unacceptable. Only as a melodrama on the cinema's blowsiest level does *On the Waterfront* really work at all.

Influenced by the tradition of the American thriller in which Kazan has worked are the French directors Clouzot, René Clément and the less expert Yves Allegret. Both Clouzot and Clément are masters of effect and suspense, and both have basically the same outlook of a theatrically, sentimentally tough cynicism. Clouzot is much more of a piece artistically than Clément and his films (*Le Corbeau*, *L'Assassin Habite au 21*, *Quai des Orfèvres*, *Le Salaire de la Peur*) have the same basic ingredients: ingenuity, thrill, and a surface sordidness which, like some of the followers of Zola, Clouzot feels is Art, the facing of

Joan Fontaine in "Letter From an Unknown Woman": Ophuls' film is a characteristic piece of period evocation, romantic, sophisticated and decorative.



Tim Holt, Anne Baxter, Joseph Cotten and Dolores Costello in the party sequence from Welles' "The Magnificent Ambersons."

Reality in all its squalor and despicability. *Le Corbeau*, for instance, is a thriller about the writing of poison pen letters in a French provincial town. The gimmick is the concealment of the writer's identity, and the suspense sequence is engineered by the pursuit of a suspected woman through the streets. But *Le Salaire de la Peur* reveals him even more clearly. In a vague Central American state four drivers have to take trucks loaded with gelignite on a cross-country journey over appalling roads. The climaxes—the negotiation of a difficult corner, the dynamiting of a rock blocking the road—are so artificially and stagily contrived for their suspense value as to be completely unbelievable. And Clouzot has even gone to the length of building a smartly symbolic Latin American shanty town, with scabrous dogs, filth, beetles, down-and-outs squabbling, drinking and making love, on the naïve assumption that he is presenting life with a brutal frankness. But the attitudes behind the film seem so simple, paltry and thin that it would not even be worth mentioning were it not for the acclaim that has been accorded it.

René Clément is more clever, less hysterically sentimental than Clouzot, but much more confused. Like Visconti he has noted certain aspects of human behaviour sharply and accurately. Constantly during his films we recognise the validity of his observations and at times they persuade us, together with his facility for putting them on the screen (the air raid sequence in *Jeux Interdits* shows his technical mastery), to take him more seriously. But Clément can never quite decide what he is going to do or say, or what viewpoint he is adopting. At times his approach seems sympathetic—an attempt to get inside the children in *Jeux Interdits*, for instance—but again he is the flippant, casual observer wisecracking about the antics of the peasants. What are we to feel at the end of *Knave of Hearts*? That Gérard Philipe is punished by being left in Valerie Hobson's clutches, or is he, as the last shot implies, as charmingly irrepressible as ever? Clément always wants to have it both ways artistically.

Where Clément and Clouzot fail, Carol Reed to a large extent succeeds. He too came to the cinema from the stage, and even in so late a film as *Odd Man Out* there is much evidence of a theatrical as distinct from a cinematic imagination. As with many of the *metteurs en scène*, the thriller is understandably his home ground, but how much he is at the mercy of his script the failure of the recent *The Man Between* demonstrated. He is a master of atmosphere (how certain his sense of place in comparison with Clouzot's) and his range can compass the dark sewers of Vienna, the spacious corridors of a London embassy, the bustle of a tropical port, a steamy lake village in the jungle. In all his films Carol Reed is dealing with the same subject, with the rebel, the rejector of society. In their different situations—Bobby Henrey seeing his beloved Baines commit murder, the Englishman going to pieces in the jungle—his heroes all react in exactly the same way: they run away from a reality that is too much for them. The resolution of this dilemma Reed never really faces. He is too identified with his heroes, he feels too strongly the same disgust for the life he is portraying, a disgust which seems partly sexual. The child as onlooker, especially of adult love-making, is a significant and disturbing image recurring in his films. Perhaps it is just the self-dramatisation implicit in the attitude which accounts for the surface hardness and precision of his films. How brilliantly in *The Outcast of the Islands* is he able, with his sharp cross-cutting between the interior darkness of the reed hut and the man approaching outside, to convey the dread and attraction of the sexual impulse. How splendid too is the last chase in *The Third Man*. Whatever reservations one may have about his films as a whole, in their details there is much to admire.

From a chronological point of view, it may seem strange to leave Orson Welles until the end of this article. His films were made mainly before the others with which I have

(Continued on page 109)



# MORALITY PLAYS

## RIGHT AND LEFT

Pauline Kael

### I. Advertising—*Night People*

ADS for men's suits show the model standing against a suspended mobile. But the man who buys knows that the mobile doesn't come with the suit: it's there to make him feel that the old business suit is different now. The anti-Sovietism of *Night People* serves a similar function. But the filmgoer who saw the anti-Nazi films of ten years ago will have no trouble recognising the characters in *Night People*, just as ten years ago he could have detected (under the Nazi blackshirts) psychopathic killers, trigger-happy cattle rustlers, and the screen villain of earliest vintage—the man who will foreclose the mortgage if he doesn't get the girl. The Soviet creatures of the night are direct descendants of the early film archetype, the bad man. Those who make films like *Night People* may or may not be privately concerned with the film's political message (the suit manufacturer may or may not be concerned with the future of wire sculpture); in the film politics are period décor—used to give melodrama the up-to-date look that will sell.

*Night People* is set in Berlin: a U.S. soldier is kidnapped; he is rescued by a U.S. Intelligence Officer (Gregory Peck) who knows how to deal with the Russians. They are "head-hunting cannibals" and must be treated as such. The film is given a superficial credibility by documentary-style shots of American soldiers, by glimpses of Berlin, and by the audience's knowledge that Americans in Europe have in fact been kidnapped. One might even conceive that someone who understood the nature of Communism might view certain Communists as "cannibals." But it would be a mistake to confuse the political attitudes presented in *Night People* with anything derived from historical understanding. Nunnally Johnson, who wrote, directed and produced the film, has himself referred to it as "Dick Tracy in Berlin."

Actual kidnappings have posed intricate political and moral problems. Should the victim be ransomed by economic concessions, should a nation submit to extortion? Were some of the victims observers for the U.S. and where does observation stop and espionage begin? We know that our government must have espionage agents in Europe—can we believe in the innocence of every victim? If they were guilty of some charges but not guilty of all the charges, what kind of protest is morally possible? The drama in the case of a Robert Vogeler or a William Oatis is in the fathoming of moral and political ambiguities. While purportedly about an East-West kidnapping, *Night People* presents a crime and a rescue. The hero has righted the wrong before we have even had a chance to explore our recollections of what may be involved in political kidnappings. Soviet ambitions and intrigue become a simple convenience to the film-maker: the label "Communism" is the guarantee that the hero

is up against a solid evil threat. For the sake of the action and pace, for the sake of melodrama, the Communism cannot be more than a label.

*Night People* is not much worse or much better than a lot of other movies—they're made cynically enough and they may, for all we know, be accepted cynically. David Riesman has pointed out that nobody believes advertising, neither those who write it nor those who absorb it. And the same can be said for most of our movies. Somebody turns the stuff out to make a living; it would seem naïve to hold him responsible for it. In a state of suspended belief a writer can put the conflict of East and West into the capable hands of Dick Tracy. And the audiences that buy standardised commodities may be too sophisticated about mass production to believe films and advertising, but they are willing to absorb products and claims—with suspended belief. They don't believe, but they don't *not* believe either. And when you accept something without believing in it, you accept it on *faith*. You buy the product by name. Who would *believe* in *Rose-Marie*? Yet the audience, after taking it in, emerges singing the Indian Love Call and it becomes a substantial part of American sentimental tone. Who would believe that *Night People* presents a political analysis? Yet the political attitudes that don't originate in political analysis become part of national political tone. Acceptance is not belief, but acceptance may imply the willingness to let it go at that and to prefer the accessible politics (to which one can feel as cynical and "knowing" as towards an ad) to political thought requiring effort, attention and involvement.

The suggestion that politics as used in melodrama are advertising décor is not intended metaphorically. I wish to suggest that films (and other forms of commercial entertainment) are becoming inseparable from advertising, and that advertising sets the stage for our national morality play.

Advertising has been borrowing from literature, art and the theatre; films meanwhile are taking over not merely the look of advertising art—clear, blatant poster design—but the very content of advertising. Put together an advertisement photograph and a movie still from *How to Marry a Millionaire* (another Nunnally Johnson production) and they merge into each other: they belong to the same genre. The new young Hollywood heroine is not too readily distinguishable from the model in the Van Raalte ad; if the ad is a few years old, chances are this is the same girl. In a few months she will be on the front of movie magazines and on the back of news magazines endorsing her favourite cigarette. She is both a commodity for sale and a salesman for other commodities (and her value as one depends upon her value as the other). Advertising dramatises a way of life with certain consumption patterns, social attitudes and goals, the same way of



Some of our conquerors . . . American intelligence officer (Gregory Peck), sergeant (Buddy Ebsen) and business man (Broderick Crawford) in a Berlin café.

life dramatised in the films; films are becoming advertising in motion.

Is *Executive Suite* in substance different from an institutional ad—"This Company Believes in the Future of America"? Break it down into shots—the hero's home, the manufacturing process scene, the mother playing catch with her son—and you are looking at pages in *Sunset, Life* and *Today's Woman*. Then open *Time*, and there are the actors from the film speaking into dictaphones to illustrate the message: "Cameron Hawley, author of *Executive Suite*, says: 'I use my dictaphone TIME-MASTER constantly and with great success.'" If we are no longer sure what medium we are in, the reason is that there are no longer any organic differences.

The common aim of attracting and pleasing the public has synthesised their methods and their content. The film and the ad tell their story so that the customer can take it all in at a glance. They show him to himself as he wants to be, and, if flattery is not enough, science and progress may clinch the sale. The new toothpaste has an activating agent; new shirts and shorts have polyester fibres running through them; *Night People* is filmed in CinemaScope with Stereophonic Sound. Can we baulk at technical advances that "2,000 years of experiment and research have brought to us"? New "technical advances" increase not only the physical accessibility of cultural goods; the content of the goods becomes increasingly more accessible. Just one thing seems to have been lost: the essence of film "magic" which lay in our imaginative absorption, our entering into the film (as we might enter into the world of a Dostoevski novel or *Middlemarch*). Now the film can come to us—one more consummation of the efforts to diminish the labour (and the joy) of imaginative participation.

Melodrama, perhaps the most highly developed type of American film, is the chief vehicle for political thought in our films (*Casablanca*, *Edge of Darkness*, *To Have and Have Not*, *North Star*, etc.). Melodrama, like the

morality play, is a popular form; structurally melodrama is the morality play with the sermons omitted and the pattern of oppositions issuing in sensational action.

In some of the war and post-war films, the writers and directors seemed to feel they were triumphing over Hollywood and over melodrama itself by putting the form to worthwhile social ends: they put sermons back in. The democratic messages (in violent thrillers such as *Cornered*) delayed and impeded the action, of course, but they helped to save the faces of those engaged in the work. While the hypocrisy of the method made the films often vulgarly insulting, and the democratic moralising became offensive dogma, the effort did indicate the moral and political disturbances, and the sense of responsibility, of the film-makers. *Night People* reduces the political thought to what it was anyway—labelling—and nothing impedes the action. The film is almost "pure" melodrama. The author doesn't try to convince himself or the public that he's performing an educational service or that the film should be taken seriously. The cynicism is easier to take than hypocrisy, but it also shows just how far we are going.

The political facts of life may shatter the stereotypes of Hollywood melodrama, but economic facts support them. The formula hero-defeats-villains has been tested at the box-office since the beginning of film history and it may last until the end. Melodrama is simple and rigid and yet flexible enough to accommodate itself to historical changes. The hero is always the defender of the right and he is *our* representative. He rarely changes labels; on the few occasions when he is not an American, he demonstrates that those on our side are just like us. (Gregory Peck's first screen role was in *Days of Glory*: as an heroic Soviet soldier he fought the evil Nazis.)

The villains are marked by one constant: they are sub-human. If the hero of *Night People* did not know that the enemy are cannibals, he might feel some qualms about the free dispensation of strychnine. Film melodrama, like



political ideology with which it has much in common, has a convenient way of disposing of the humanity of enemies: *we* stand for humanity; *they* stand for something else. The robbers who are shot, the Nazis who are knifed—they are cowards or fanatics, and they didn't deserve to live. Fear, on the one hand, and, on the other, devotion to a "misguided" cause to the disregard of personal safety are evidence of subhumanity. The villains are not human; if they were, they'd be on our side. When historical circumstances change and our former enemies become allies, we let bygones be bygones and they are restored to human estate. Thus the little yellow bastards are now cultured Japanese; the blood-guilty Germans are now hard-working people, so akin to Americans in their moral standards and ability to organise an efficient economy; now it is the Russians, the courageous pioneers and fighting men of the war years, who are treacherous and subhuman. Political melodrama looks ahead.

This is the level of the anti-Communism of *Night People*. And it is at this level that the advertising-entertainment medium has political affect. In a culture which has been movie-centred for thirty years, films are a reflection of popular American thought as well as an influence upon it. At the Army-McCarthy hearings, the participants, conscious of the radio and television audience, find it necessary to proclaim, each in his turn, that he *hates* Communists. McCarthy imputes weakness and political unreliability to the Secretary of the Army by suggesting that Stevens merely *dislikes* Communists. In other words, if he knew what they were, he would *hate* them; he lacks the hero's sureness. McCarthy draws political support by the crude, yet surprisingly controlled, intensity of his hatred of Communists; the intensity suggests that he, like Intelligence Officer Peck, knows how to take care of rats, and his lack of scruples becomes a political asset. Further knowledge is irrelevant; the hero does not need to look too closely into the heart of evil.

Knowledge may even be dangerous. The hero should know that Communists are rats without needing to examine the nature of Communism. Is our thinking so primitive that we fear that a close look will not only expose us to destruction but will turn us into rats, that Communism is contagious? The man of conscience who examines the enemy sees human beings—the primitive explanation is that he got too close and was infected. If you know enough to hate Communists, you know enough; if you know more, perhaps you can no longer hate. The ritualistic nature of this popular anti-Communism was made apparent in the public reaction to Dean Acheson's remark that he wouldn't turn his back on Alger Hiss. Acheson spoke as one human being talking about another; he was attacked for his failure to recognise that Soviet agents are not supposed to be regarded as human beings.

The morality play had meaning as an instructive dramatisation, an externalisation of the conflict within man. Our popular culture and politics, and even our popular religion, take this conflict and project it into the outside world. The resulting simplification has immediate advantages: we are exonerated, they are guilty. In contrast with drama which sensitises man to human complexity,

melodrama desensitises man. No wonder the public has no patience with real political issues, nor with the moral complexities of Shakespeare or Greek tragedy. The movies know how to do it better: in a film, Stevens or McCarthy would prove his case; in a film, Oppenheimer would be innocent or guilty.

Senator McCarthy has not the look of a man in the grip of a fixed idea; rather he has the look of a man who has the fixed idea well in hand. When national issues can be discussed in terms of "ferreting out rats" (and even McCarthy's political opponents accept the term) the man with the fixed idea is the man who appears to stand for something. He has found the role to play. When Senator McCarthy identifies himself with *right* and identifies anyone who opposes him with the Communist conspiracy, he carries the political morality play to its paranoid conclusion—a *reductio ad absurdum* in which right and wrong and political good and evil dissolve into: are you for me or against me? But the question may be asked, are not this morality and these politics fundamentally just as absurd and just as dangerous when practised on a national scale in our commercial culture? The world is not divided into good and evil, enemies are not all alike, Communists are not just Nazis with a different accent; and it is precisely the task of political analysis (and the incidental function of literature and drama) to help us understand the nature of our enemies and of our opposition to them. A country which accepts wars as contests between good and evil is suffering from the delusion that the morality play symbolises real political conflicts.

Some political theorists would like to manipulate this delusion: they hold that the only way to combat Communism is to employ the "useful myth" that the current world struggle is a battle between Christianity and atheism,



Violence in Berlin : the East-West kidnapping in "Night People."

that the free world represents God on earth and the Communist countries, the anti-Christ. Such a "useful myth" may very likely, however, be purchased (for the most part) just as cynically as it is sold. Is a myth a myth for the public that accepts it without conviction? The modern man who fights in a mythical holy crusade knows he's compelled to fight—whether it's for God or not. The real danger in manipulation, and in the cynicism that goes with it, is that we may lose the capacity for those extensions in height, in depth, in space which are the experience of art and thought. If the public becomes accustomed to being pleased and pandered to, the content is drained out of democratic political life.

After dozens of anti-Nazi films and countless slick stories and articles, the public had had enough of Hitler. What they wearied of had only the slenderest connection with the subject of Naziism; they got tired of the old formula with the Nazi label. But they didn't reject the formula, they settled for a change of labels. In the same way Hollywood may well exhaust anti-Communism before it has gotten near it: the cycle begins by exploiting public curiosity and ends by satiating it.

All our advertising is propaganda, of course, but it has become so much a part of our life, is so pervasive, that we just don't know what it is propaganda *for*. Somehow it keeps the wheels rolling and that seems to be what it's for. Why don't other peoples see that we are the heroes and the Russians cannibals? One reason is that America's public relations romance with itself is a spectacle to the rest of the world. In Hollywood productions, the American soldiers and civilians abroad are soft touches, chivalrous under the wisecracks, patronising and generous towards unfortunate little people the world over; aroused by injustice, the American is Robin Hood freed by birth from the threat of the Sheriff of Nottingham. Though this propaganda fails us abroad (too many Americans having been there) it functions at home as an entertaining form of self-congratulation and self-glorification: it makes the audience feel good. While we consume our own propaganda, other people are not so gullible about us. They have a different way of being gullible: they are influenced by Communist propaganda about us.

## II. Propaganda—*Salt of the Earth*

ONE wonders if the hero of *Night People*, so sharp at detecting the cannibal under the Communist tunic, would recognise the Communist *position* when he saw it. *Salt of the Earth* is as clear a piece of Communist propaganda as we have had in many years, but the critic of the *New York Times* saw, "... in substance, simply a strong pro-labour film with a particularly sympathetic interest in the Mexican-Americans with whom it deals," and the critic of the *Los Angeles Daily News* had this to say: "If there is propaganda in this picture it is not an alien one, but an assertion of principles no thoughtful American can reject." There are Americans, then, who have not learned that Communist propaganda concentrates on local grievances. They fail to recognise that Communism makes use of principles that no thoughtful American (or Frenchman, or Englishman) can reject. Communism in each region appears to be divested of its Soviet accoutrements; its aspect is not alien; it is effective

because it organises, or captures the direction of, groups struggling for status.

Despite the reactions of some critics, it is not likely that the American film audience would react favourably to the publicity campaign, "At last! An honest movie about American working people." If American working people seek an image of their attitudes and beliefs they will find it in Hollywood films—they have helped to put it there. Though a Hollywood version glamorises their lives, it does justice to their dreams. If they did go to see *Salt* it is not likely that more than a small proportion would see anything that struck home, and that perhaps would be only as a reminder of depression days.

At special showings or at art film houses, it's a different story. *Salt* can seem true and real for those liberals and progressives whose political thinking has never gone beyond the 'thirties. Depression social-consciousness is their exposed nerve: touch it and it becomes the only reality, more vivid than the actual conditions they live in. Many Americans felt the first stirrings of political awareness in the 'thirties, and nothing that has happened since has affected them comparably. They look back to the social theatre and WPA art as to a Golden Age. The prosperity that followed is viewed almost as a trick, a device to conceal the truth and to prevent the oppressed workers from joining together to defeat ruthless big business. Prosperity is integrated with so much advertising and cynicism that it seems a sham—it doesn't look *real*. In search of something to believe in, they see the hollowness of the films played out in modern apartments and neat little cottages and tend to situate truth in the worst possible setting—in what has been left out of Hollywood films. What looks ugly and depressing must be true, since what looks prosperous is as empty as an ad. The depths to which they may fall have a greater emotional claim on them than the prosperity they (fearfully) enjoy. The worst makes the greatest claim to truth.

*Salt of the Earth* is not likely to be effective propaganda for overthrowing the capitalist bosses at home, a task which the Communists are not likely to envision in the United States anyway. But it is extremely shrewd propaganda for the urgent business of the U.S.S.R.: making colonial peoples believe that they can expect no good from the United States; convincing Europe and Asia and the rest of the world that there are no civil liberties in the U.S.A. and that our capitalism is really fascism. The American Communists are not so much interested these days in glorifying the Soviet Union as in destroying European and Asiatic faith in the United States. Fifteen years ago, if we had seen a movie like *Salt*, we might have tossed it off with "it's worse than propaganda, it's a dull movie." Flippancy makes us rather uneasy today: Communist propaganda, seizing upon our failures and our imperfections, and, when these are not strong enough, inventing others, has very nearly succeeded in discrediting us to the whole world. The discreditable aspects of American life are realities to be dealt with. Communist propaganda, however, treats them as opportunities.

The raw material of *Salt of the Earth* is a 1951-52 strike of Mexican-American zinc miners in New Mexico. The film, made in 1953, was sponsored by the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (expelled from the CIO in 1950 as Communist-dominated), and financed by Independent Productions Corporation (the money was



“borrowed from liberal Americans”) and producer are blacklisted in Hollywood as fellow travellers.

What brought these people together to make a film—zinc miners, liberal Americans, blacklisted film-makers. This was no mere commercial enterprise, and in our brief history as a nation of film addicts, there has never been anything like a group of several hundred people working together in devotion to film art. If art was their aim, how misguided their effort—for what work of art, in any field, has ever resulted from “group discussion and collective constructive criticism” (“no less than 400 people had read, or heard a reading of, the screenplay by the time we commenced production”) tive criticism—where have we heard that term before? It is not irony but justice that the artists who chose this method came out with a film as dreary and programmatic as the films made by those who have collective criticism forced upon them.

Here is the opening of the film and our introduction to the heroine, Esperanza: “A woman at work chopping wood. Though her back is to the camera, we sense her weariness in toil by the set of her shoulders . . . we begin to gather that she is large with child. The woman carries the load of wood to an outdoor fire, staggering under its weight. . . .” It doesn’t take us long to find out that this is eternal downtrodden woman, but if we’re slow, her first words set us straight: “How shall I begin my story that has no beginning? How shall I start the telling of all that is yet becoming?”

The miners of *Salt of the Earth* are striking for equality (principally equality of safety conditions) “Anglos,” but the strike is not a bargaining weapon for definite limited objectives. It is inflated with lessons, suggestions and implications until it acquires symbolic status. This is a strike in which the workers grow. “Have you learned nothing from this strike?” Esperanza asks her husband, Ramon, and speaks of her own development: “I want to rise. And push everything up with me as I go. . . .” “Strike” in *Salt of the Earth* is used in its revolutionary meaning, as a training ground in solidarity, a preparation for the big strike to come—a microcosm of the coming revolution

If the author had cut up a pamphlet and passed out the parts, he wouldn’t have given out anything very different from this:

*Esperanza:* They tried to turn people against us. They printed lies about us in their newspapers. . . . They said . . . that all the Mexicans ought to be sent back where they came from. But the men said . . .

*Antonio* (slapping newspaper): How can I go back where I came from. The shack I was born in is buried under company property.

*Kalinsky:* Why don’t nobody ever tell the bosses to go back where they came from?

*Cente:* Wouldn’t be no bosses in the state of New Mexico if they did.

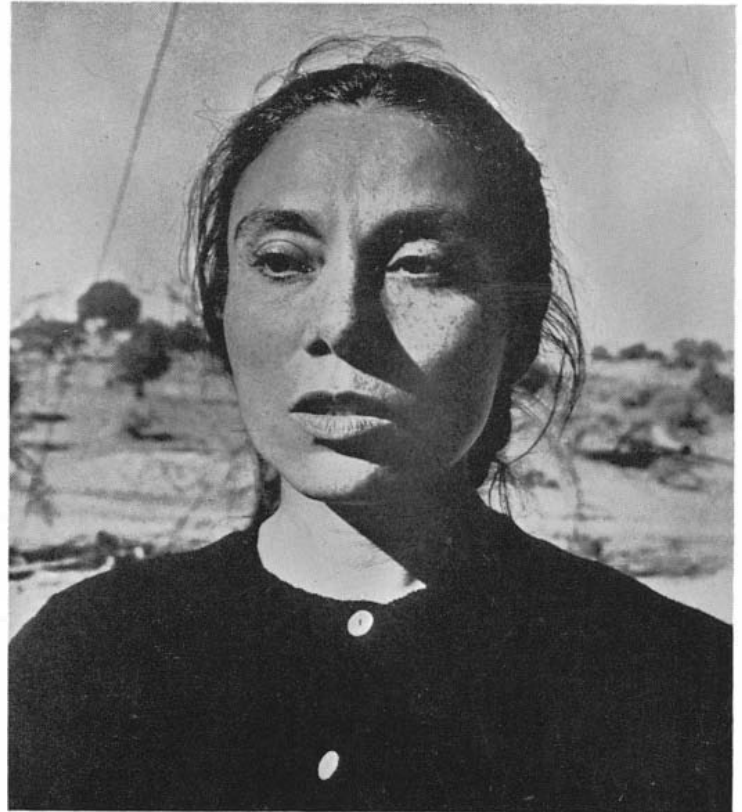
*Alfredo* (dreamily): Brother! Live to see the day!

*Antonio:* Talk about wide open spaces! Far as the eye can see—no Anglos.

Ramon holds up a finger, correcting him.

*Ramon:* No Anglo bosses.

This pedagogical tone, so reminiscent of the ’thirties, is maintained throughout much of the film. Social realism has never been able to pass up an opportunity for instruction: these strikers are always teaching each other little constructive lessons. Here is Ramon reprimanding Frank,



“The Madonna on the picket line”: Rosaura Revueitas in “Salt of the Earth.”

the “Anglo” union organiser, for his failure to recognise a picture of Juarez:

*Ramon:* . . . If I didn’t know a picture of George Washington, you’d say I was an awful dumb Mexican.

*Frank* (deeply chagrined): I’m an awful dumb Anglo . . . I’ve got a lot to learn.

Then, of course, there are the big lessons: when Esperanza is in labour and the Sheriff is asked to get the doctor he responds with, “You kiddin’? Company doctor won’t come to no picket line.”

speaks to the men picketing: “They, up there, your bosses—they don’t care whether your children live or die. Let them be born like animals! (A pause.)

while you’re marching, you men. Remember well.” (She spits in the road.)

Another facet of social realism is the inflation of dialogue to the rank of folk wisdom (Ramon: “‘No money down. Easy term payments.’

instalment plan, it’s the curse of the working class.”) and folk wit (Esperanza: “Finding scabs in Zinc town, Ramon said, was like looking for a rich man in heaven . . .”)

learning and bosses’ lies. They are the custodians of the real social truth.

The story is not just slanted: the slant *is* the story. Even the baby’s christening party—in the night-time—is interrupted by deputy sheriffs with a repossession order for the radio. When the company gets an eviction order, we see the deputies “dumping the precious accumulations of a lifetime on to the road: the shrine, a kewpie doll, a faded photograph.”

Juarez is “smashed in the dust.”

for this sort of thing, you’ll know when you first see

Esperanza's shiny radio that it will be taken away from her, just as you'll know when you see the photograph of Juarez that it wouldn't be framed except to be smashed.

Detail upon detail adds up to a picture of fascism. How can responsible critics fail to see what they're getting? Well, something has been added to this old popular front morality play, something that seems to give it new credibility.

The superintendent of the mine (from his Cadillac) suggests to the sheriff that it would be nice to cut Ramon "down to size." The sheriff "touches his stetson courteously" and, a few moments later, gives the signal to four deputies—Vance, Kimbrough and two others. They arrest Ramon (who offers no resistance), handcuff him and thrust him into their car. Vance, "a pale, cavernous, slackjawed man," is "slowly drawing on a pigskin glove." After an exchange of a few words, the "gloved hand comes up, swipes Ramon across his mouth," as Vance says softly, "Now you know that ain't no way to talk to a white man."

"Ramon sits tense now, awaiting the next blow. A trickle of blood runs down his chin. . . .

Kimbrough: Hey, Vance. You said this Mex was full of pepper. He don't look so peppery now.

Vance: Oh, but he is. This bullfighter's full of chile. He drives a gloved fist into Ramon's belly. Ramon gasps, his eyes bulge. . . . Vance strikes him in the abdomen again. Kimbrough snickers. . . . Ramon is doubled up, his head between his legs. Vance pulls him erect.

Vance: Hold your head up, Pancho. That ain't no way to sit.

Ramon (a mutter in Spanish): I'll outlive you all, you lice.

Vance (softly): How's that? What's that Spic talk? He strikes

Ramon gives a choked cry. . . . Kimbrough holds up Ramon's head while Vance punches him methodically. Ramon gasps in Spanish:

Ramon: Mother of God . . . have mercy. . . ."

As if this were not enough, the next shots of Ramon being struck in the belly are intercut with Esperanza's contractions as she gives birth. Finally, "the two images merge, and undulate, and blur . . . we hear the feeble wail of a newborn infant."

This full dress racial treatment is the politically significant ingredient in *Salt of the Earth*. Although socially, economically and legally the United States has been expiating its sins against minorities in record time, it is still vulnerable. The Communists exploit this vulnerability: the message for export is that America is a fascist country which brutally oppresses the darker peoples.

Frank, *Salt's* union organiser, tells us that "equality's the one thing the bosses can't afford." The explanation offered is pitifully inadequate: "The biggest club they have over the Anglo locals is, 'well—at least you get more than the Mexicans.'" Ramon replies, "Okay, so discrimination hurts the Anglo too, but it hurts me more. And I've had enough of it." This catechism of Communist economics has a creaky sound. A rational Ramon in a film set in 1951 might very well ask: Why can't this company afford equality when so many others can?

To ask that would expose the mystification central to *Salt of the Earth* by indicating that this community is no microcosm of our society, and that the situation depicted is grotesquely far from typical. The film's strike has not been placed against the background of American life which would provide perspective and contrast. It stays within a carefully composed system of references. (Esperanza describes the help the striking miners got—"messages of

solidarity and the crumpled dollar bills of working men." After fifteen years of wanting to know who the company president is, the miners come across a picture of him in a "Man of Distinction" ad.)

Let's take a look at the film's claims to truth and "honesty." The union president (who played Ramon) written that a Production Committee had "the responsibility of seeing that our picture ran true to life from start to finish. Occasionally there were meetings in which the union people pointed out to our Hollywood friends that a scene we had just shot was not true in certain details. When that happened, we all pitched in to correct the mistake." I think we may accept the evidence that those several hundred people who made the film believed that it was *true*; from this it does not follow, however, that we can assume that all the film's incidents belong to the period of the 1951-52 strike.

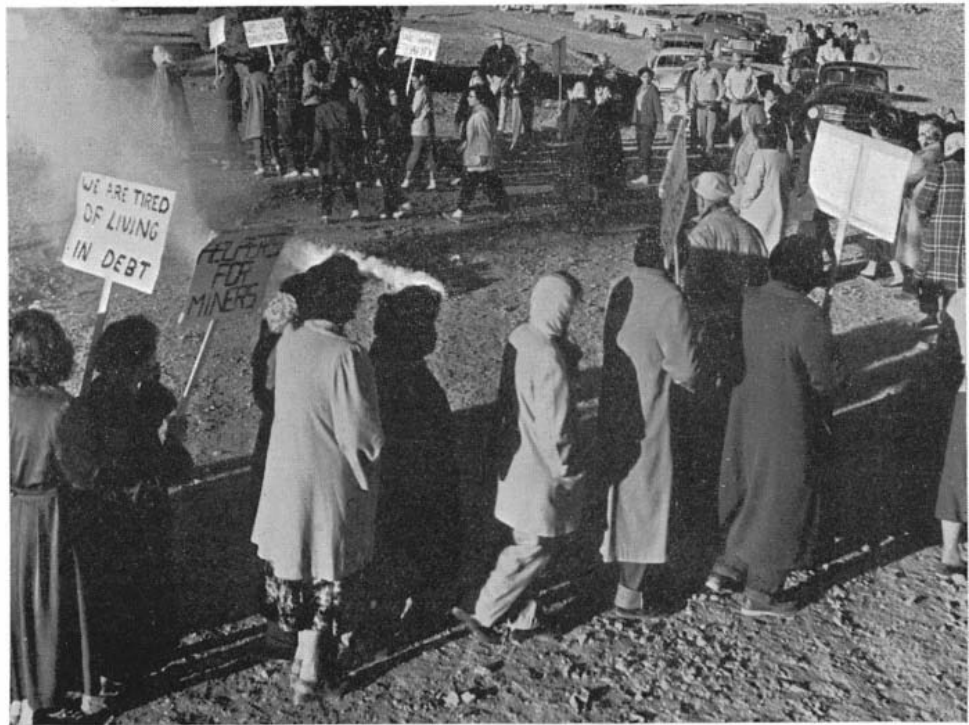
Let's take a further look at what the union president writes: "We don't have separate pay rates any more. . . . Thank God for our union and for the men who organised it. Back in the 'thirties, they were blacklisted, thrown off company property and told to take their houses with them . . . *Salt of the Earth* was not intended to be a documentary record of that particular strike (1951-52). But I will say this. It is a true account of our people's lives and struggles." So perhaps the eviction in the film does not derive from the 1951-52 strike; perhaps the miners in 1951-52 were not striking for equal safety conditions at all. And it would still be a "true," honest movie to those who made it. If they accept this film as "fundamentally" true of their lives, a "symbolic" truth that is higher, *more* true than the plain details of that strike, then, probably, they can also take the next step, and believe that their struggle is typical and symbolic of American society (the sheriff who takes orders and bribes from the bosses symbolises government as capitalism's hired man; the company officers represent the decadent quality of American business; the love story of Ramon and Esperanza symbolises the vitality of the masses, etc.).

Can the people who had a "constructive" hand in the script believe in the abstract, symbolic characters as representations of their lives? Don't the miners' wives see that something is wrong somewhere when the famous Mexican actress who plays Esperanza, the symbol of *their* lives, is so unlike them? The miners' wives—big women in slacks and jackets, with short permanented hair, and a pleasant, rather coarse plainness—suggest the active, liberated manner of free American women. Esperanza, fine-boned, gentle and passive, her long hair pulled back, dressed in drab, long skirts, is the Madonna on the picket line. Can the women accept nobility incarnate as the image of themselves? Or is it that they have gotten so far into symbolic thinking that they believe in this heroine not merely as their representative but as the symbol of *all* suffering humanity—so that she doesn't really have to be at all like them, since she represents a higher truth about them? I think we must allow for the possibility that those who see themselves as symbols are capable also of holding rather symbolic notions of truth.

If we want to know something about the treatment of minority peoples in the United States we don't look at one community, we examine and compare data in various communities, cities, industries and institutions. We examine the extraordinary social phenomenon of pecking



"Salt of the Earth": the miners' wives take over the picket line.



(in one town the Irish peck the Italians, in the next the Italians peck the Mexicans, in other towns the Mexicans peck the Negroes, and some cities are a regular chicken yard, with Armenians or Portuguese last in the line) and other forms of internecine warfare among minorities. We look at the life of the integrated as well as the un-integrated minorities; we don't assume that the life of the Mexican-American zinc miner is more symbolic of the treatment of minorities than the life of the corner grocer whose name is Ramirez.

Compare *Salt of the Earth* with the films—social films, too, of artists whose work is informed with individual imagination. Bunuel, whose shocking *Los Olvidados* gives the lie to the concept that the oppressed are the salt of the earth. De Sica, whose joyful little masterpiece *Miracle in Milan* flouted the expectations of Americans who looked to Italian neo-realism for sombre, serious "truth." Eisenstein, who selected and stacked his images for ideological purposes, but who did it, at least, on a grand scale. The enemy was flamboyantly gross and evil, the violence obsessively brutal. Barbaric splendour, excesses overflowed the bounds of the ideology—just as Griffith's fairy tale riches could not be contained in the pedantic structure of *Intolerance*. These artists use the film as a feast for eye and mind.

The proletarian morality play is a strict form: the heroes and villains illustrate a lesson. The hero is humanity, the struggling worker trying to reach consciousness of his historical role. He is vital, full of untapped strength; the brutal oppression to which he has been subjected has made him all the more human. He is a man who can learn. The villains are the hero's class enemies—they are representatives of a decadent ruling class and they must be taught a lesson. Though they control economic power, they are personally weak: they have lost the life-force. They are subhuman. The play is not so much a sermon as a guide to action. It serves as a Marxist demonstration of the potential strength of the working class—or, in this

case, minority peoples. *Salt of the Earth* is full of violence; it avails itself of the excitations of melodrama, but the violence is symbolic.

"Social realism" is supposed to derive its art from reality. The art is negligible and nothing could be further from reality than these abstractions performing symbolic actions in a depressing setting. The setting does refer to the real world, however, and *Salt of the Earth* can seem "true" to people who have been in the Imperial Valley or New Mexico or the Southern States. They have seen shocking living conditions and they may feel the moral necessity to do something about them. Communist propaganda takes this desire and converts it into a sense of anxiety and distress by "demonstrating" that all of American power supports this shocking situation. The moral sensibility that has given vitality to American principles is manipulated by these propagandists into a denial that America stands for those principles, and into an insistence that the *real* principles of American life are revealed in the sore spot. The moral person feels helpless and alienated unless he accepts the path that is offered to him—identifying his moral interests with the revolutionary aims of the working class.

It is symptomatic of the dangers in a commercialised culture that these people—the ones who made the film and the ones who believe it—can find nothing else in American life to which they can give allegiance. They are articulate, literate. They are, no doubt, sincere in their dedication to the cause of the downtrodden. A film like *Salt of the Earth* seems so ridiculously and patently false that it requires something like determination to consider that those who make it believe in it. They serve a *higher* truth—and, of course, they have a guiding thread for their beliefs, a lifeline which directs them through the maze of realities and symbols. Those who hold the other end of the line are very shrewd in jerking it—now this way, now that. But what artist with vision or imagination could keep his fist closed so tight?



"Drunken Angel": Toshiro Mifune plays an embittered and desperate gangster in this story set in post-war Tokyo.

## THE FILMS OF KUROSAWA

Jay Leyda

THE surprise of the entire film world at the appearance of *Rashomon* at the 1951 Venice Festival will surely be a dramatic paragraph in all future international film histories. That film made such a powerful impression outside commercial film channels that we have all been compelled to make room, though a small one, for *Rashomon*, for its director, Kurosawa, and for Japanese pictures in general. This victory makes one hope that no new film by Kurosawa will ever again be neglected, or restricted to an audience of his countrymen.

If Kurosawa's stature as an artist is to be measured, it will be necessary to reach behind *Rashomon* to the pictures produced during his first eight years of filmmaking—the "occupation period" of his work—and especially his masterpiece, *Drunken Angel* (*Yoidore Tenshi*). This film (little known outside Japan) involuntarily played a very practical role in Kurosawa's career, for it is to *Drunken Angel* that we owe the Venice entry of *Rashomon*. Although so acute and sensitive a film observer as the late Joseph Burstyn was sufficiently impressed by one screening of *Drunken Angel* to advise the festival organizers to spare no efforts in obtaining any new film by its maker, the raw fierceness of *Drunken Angel* made Burstyn hesitate to show it to American audiences, and at the time of his death this was one of the films waiting in storage for his decision. Further to delay his decision, Burstyn's advisors had detected too disturbing an anti-American note in some sequences of the film. When Kurosawa was denied admission to the United States (with a Japanese film delegation in 1952), *Drunken Angel* was doomed to wait longer for its American audience.

What was the ground in which the talent of Kurosawa could develop and produce such astonishing films as

*Drunken Angel* and *Rashomon*? Film production conditions in Tokyo are no less hampering and narrow than at Culver City or Pinewood, and can be more restrictive and hardened against originality or unorthodoxy. Styles and methods were imitatively modelled on foreign film successes—even today, modern subjects in Japanese films are stylistically indistinguishable, with rare exceptions, from French screen melodrama or American genre comedy. Subjects drawn from Japan's history or her rich literature of fantasy, often employing the actors or effects of the Kabuki theatre, were pressed into shapes that a Murnau or a Sternberg would have required. I have seen extremely handsome Japanese films of history and fairy-tale that the makers of *Faust* and *The Scarlet Empress* would have envied for the reproduction of their own peculiar gloss and sheen. The large Japanese film public is so fond of foreign films that imitations of an admired import are usually assured of popular success.

Outside the studios, especially since the war, there has been the counter-balance of a vigorous, independent, even amateur film movement, with its usual partner—an articulate and critical minority within the popular audience. This movement puts film-making in many non-commercial hands; strong trade unions and political parties (including the Communist) produce films, and find audiences for them. All this makes for a tussle of ideas, talk, opinions that furnishes encouragement to restless professionals, and creates an atmosphere in which a responsible, conscientious artist cannot be glib, no matter how this might ease his career and income.

This, then, is the ground—ideal but unexpected—for a film-maker who is able to pick up the keen edge of Vigo and the poetic tension of Dovzhenko where those masters left them, and mould these qualities to his own temerity.



## II

Akira Kurosawa was born in Tokyo on March 23rd, 1910. On completing his schooling he tried the career of a painter, but gave that up when he decided he was not talented enough. He entered the film industry in 1936 as an assistant director at the Toho company, where he became first assistant to the director Kajiro Yamamoto—collaborating on Yamamoto's scripts and entering scripts of his own in contests conducted by film studios and magazine

made a noticed contribution as writer and as assistant director was *The Horse (Uma)* in 1940. Ten years later a *New York Times* interviewer summarised his work during the war years that followed: "The war period was professionally miserable for Mr. Kurosawa. After five years as an assistant director and script writer, he had just attained his majority with the Toho Motion Picture Company, his home studio, when strict censorship placed him in a vice. He shot only two stories during the war, one in two parts." This two-part film was the first to be written and directed by Kurosawa alone, the latter part (1945) being a necessary sequel to the unusual success of the first part (1943), a melodrama about a judo champion, *Sugata Sanshiro*. Between these two war-time successes he made *The Most Beautiful (Ichiban Utsukushiku)*, 1944, whose subject—women employed in a war-plant making optical machinery—presages the social subjects of his post-war films.

Kurosawa's first post-war film was co-directed with Yamamoto. This film, with its hopeful title *People Who Make Tomorrow (Asu o Tsukuru Hitobito)*, had a theme that, regardless of the film's artistic quality, makes me regret my inability to see it for the purposes of this article: it showed the democratisation of a motion picture studio. Such a subject must have contained not only a picture of studio conditions in the last war years and initial occupation days of 1945 and 1946, but must also have embodied Kurosawa's and Yamamoto's specific hopes for their function as film-makers in a democratic Japan.

The five pre-*Rashomon* films by Kurosawa that I have

<sup>1</sup>One of these early scripts by Kurosawa that drew upon his pictorial training was a scientific film, *Snow (Uki)*. To this day Kurosawa writes scripts for other directors, including Yamamoto.

seen, though uniformly "well-made," are not all credits to his reputation. They alternate so exactly, in being superb or commonplace, that the explanation for this phenomenon—too curious to dismiss as "uneven"—may lie outside Kurosawa's talents: I'm inclined to think that the ordinary films are the prices he has paid to the studios for letting him risk his best films. Georges Sadoul's essay on Japanese film economics (in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, November, 1953) postulates a shakiness in both fiscal structure and studio policies there that would seem to justify Kurosawa's frequent shifts from studio to studio. Another grain of evidence to support this "bargaining" theory of Kurosawa's production history is in the gossip that *Rashomon* was his proof that he could make an effective film without using one of his "dangerous" subjects. (What lies beneath the "undangerous" surface of *Rashomon* is, of course, another matter—and not one that would interest the front office of the Daiei Company or the film's American distributor, R.K.O.) Japanese with whom I've discussed this *quid pro quo* theory do not agree with me; they feel that Kurosawa puts his full force into every film, with varying success.

The earliest Kurosawa film I've seen was *Youth Feels No Regret (Waga Seishun ni Kui Nashi)*, released at the end of 1946. Its subject is academic freedom, as reflected in the dilemma of an ageing university professor (in the Japan of the 1930's), who is pressured at last into supporting the government's militarist ambitions, but is backed in his fight by the students and his daughter. This was a natural subject for such an abruptly transitional period as Japan's in 1946—and though Kurosawa handled the film with style and passion, it remained "a lesson of the past," a thematically bold gesture by an artist who had not yet found his sure foot.

Kurosawa's next film (that, to my regret, I have not yet seen, and for which I am dependent on two synopses) sounds like wryly realist observation of an urban Daphnis and Chloë. In *Wonderful Sunday (Subarashiki Nichiyobi)*, 1947 a poor couple, in love, spend a Sunday together, a Sunday that ends when, in search of an announced free concert, they find an empty hall. "Their cheerful disposition makes their ears fill with beautiful music." In his next and seventh film, *Drunken Angel*, Kurosawa fused all the elements tested in his previous works—violence,



"Tora no-ō: made shortly after the war, this adaptation of a legendary Noh play was Kurosawa's first period film.

analysis, idyll—to make his masterpiece.

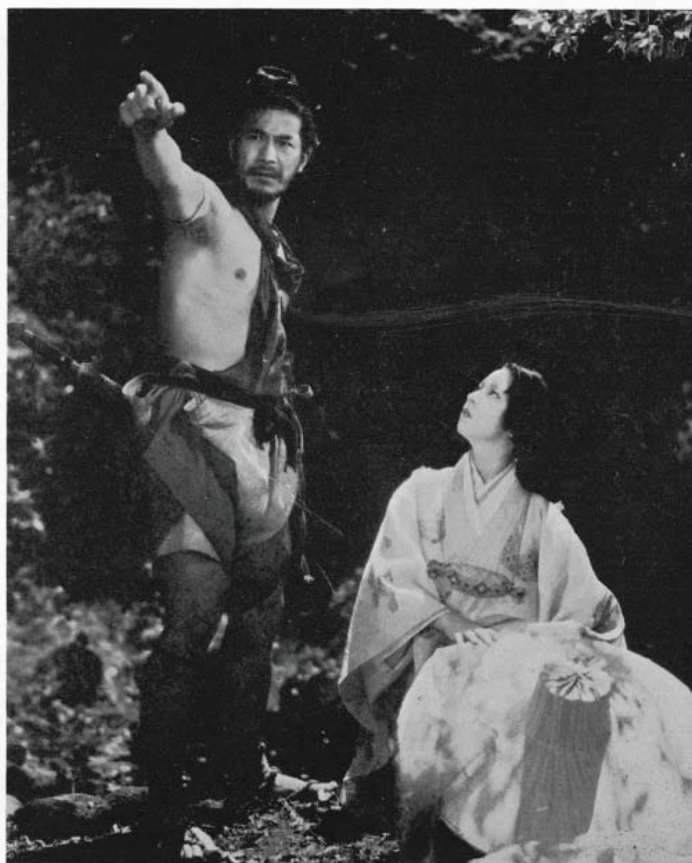
### III

*The rites are forgotten,  
Vice rots the remnant  
Defiling the women,  
And from their corruption  
Comes mixing of castes:  
The curse of confusion  
Degrades the victims  
And damns the destroyers. . . .  
The ancient, the sacred,  
Is broken, forgotten.  
Such is the doom  
Of the lost, without caste-rites:  
Darkness and doubting  
And hell for ever.*

This passage from the introductory book of the *Bhagavad-Gita* (as translated by Christopher Isherwood and S. Prabhavanda) could stand as a statement of the opening situation of *Drunken Angel* (possibly of *Bicycle Thieves*, too)—and the film's faith in the goodness of men, despite the "darkness and doubting," could be Kurosawa's personal translation of the divine solution offered by the *Gita*.

The story of *Drunken Angel* circles around a slum doctor who tries to force health and a happy future on a man who wants neither, who isn't sure what he wants: before the war this man had been a petty but powerful gangster—now he is confused, embittered, desperate, a tubercular victim of war. His attempts to ignore the present and restore the past are watched with pity and understanding by the doctor, who seeks an escape of his own in liquor and in his humble professional duties. This story is developed not so much in plot, but in a series of tangents, jutting away from (yet always returning to) these two central lives; a street encounter, a new patient, a bowl of rice, a song—each trifle serves to lift the film and its story to a more painful level. The increasing stress of this gradual, steady ascent makes reality so feverish that a nightmare looks real, and a real fight seems a nightmare. Though the photography is as piercing as a needle's point, the script structure is as fluid and circling as a meditation. And Kurosawa told the *Times* interviewer that he seeks "simplification"!

True—the nightmare in the film is a simple one: alongside the doomed gangster a coffin opens—out comes another image of himself to race after him along an



"*Rashomon*": Toshiro Mifune and Machiko Kyo, as the bandit and the nobleman's wife.

endless shore-line, not quite catching him even though his dead self can run many times faster than his live self. Perhaps it is the "simplicity" of this dream that makes it so frightening. The knife-fight, too, is a *simple* fight to the death—yet how do *we* happen to find ourselves in the midst of that mess of blood and wet paint and steel and straining bodies! Some explanation may be found in Kurosawa's co-ordination of his composition scheme to the needs of each sequence—which any viewer of *Rashomon* can well believe. His shots are, always and primarily, compositions in movement; these can be the slashing movement-compositions of the fight, or they can be as delicately unexpected as a half-screened composition by Utamaro, as in one of the conversations of *Drunken Angel*: into an empty and flat grey space (a piece of paper wall) a head finally intrudes, to make its delayed answer to the question of the previous shot.

"Range" is a word that any Kurosawa film evokes, and *Drunken Angel* shows his range to be as wide as the Kabuki theatre's—from a pastel pianissimo to a high-pitched fortissimo (climbing aloft on every sense), leaving the spectator gasping who is used only to the two middle octaves of the "normal" film. The appeal to all the senses is a conscious one, too, and a stronger appeal than we expect from a black-and-white film: the sense of colour in the smeared blood and paint of the knife-fight might have been less powerful *in colour*.

The women of *Drunken Angel* show another range: the older woman of the slyly servile past, attending to forgotten rites; the adolescent guarded by tradition; the new black-market woman (goal for black-market man); the



"*Drunken Angel*": Takashi Shimura, Chiyeiko Nakakita and Toshiro Mifune.





"Hakuchi": Toshiro Mifune and Setsuko Hara in a scene from Kurosawa's adaptation of "The Idiot."

working girl who says what she thinks; the very young girl (the future?) who speaks the film's final words as she carries the X-ray negatives that show her lungs free from disease.

Though the film's idea springs from one artist's attitude to the corruption and degradation among a defeated people, *Drunken Angel* is not a slumming experience to be added to other exotic dips into alien poverty. Kurosawa's disgust and anger—and hope—bring the film's so very foreign-looking material close to home. The ugliness of the night-club and juke-box scenes strikes a different note of Kurosawa's anger; without showing a single American soldier, the film makes his trace perceptible.

As the title, *Drunken Angel*, reflects the top, physical layer of this significant film, a friend has suggested, for the film's eventual American and European release, a title that fits the basic layer of the film—*Fallen Angel*.

#### IV

*Drunken Angel* was followed by a step backwards: *The Silent Duel* (*Shizukanaru Ketto*, 1949) is based on an absurdly unscientific and theatrical novel about venereal disease, filmed as a stock subject (perhaps an assignment?) with the tightly-bound structure of a Scribe play—a shock after the completely original film structure of *Drunken Angel*. *The Silent Duel* is full of moments that could only have been invented and controlled by a genuine film artist: but here such moments are mere ornaments to a hollow story not worth this artist's attention.

Working again at his old studio, Toho, Kurosawa made another brilliant film, *Stray Dog* (*Nora Inu*, 1949). Lacking the penetration of *Drunken Angel*, *Stray Dog* has all

"Hakuchi": Mifune with Masayuki Mori, who plays the Japanese equivalent of Dostoevski's Prince Myshkin.

the excitement of contrasting locales and atmospheres, the torrent of vividly glimpsed personalities, that a skilful detective story writer such as Raymond Chandler employs to keep his reader nervous and unsatisfied until the end. *Stray Dog* looks like a detective film, and its two chief characters are detectives, but its substance is far more rewarding to the spectator than this form usually provides. The revolver of a rookie detective is stolen in a crowded tram, and his career is threatened if he cannot recover the weapon. With its recovery as motive, the search begins in the slums and rich villas of Tokyo—and back into memories of his war service—but, before his search is successful, the motive has been broadened to reveal something of the nature of criminals and those who control them. The chase has become many-layered, and to our fascination with the clues and details of the hunt, Kurosawa adds both emotion and intellectual curiosity.

For the Shochiku Company Kurosawa then made a clever but superficial film called *Scandal* (*Shubun*, 1950), about the petty brutalities of big city Bohemian life, the circle of painters' studios and journalists' offices. A far more ambitious project at Shochiku was his translation of Dostoevski's *The Idiot* (*Hakuchi*) into terms of modern Japanese life. From the *New York Times*: "It ran three hours in the projection room. The Shochiku Company insisted on cutting it to conventional, commercial length. The director argued that if butchered it would really live up to its title, and the audience would be baffled. Management won and Kurosawa left Shochiku . . .", reminding us that we once had a film-making talent as rich as Kurosawa's—a director who tried to please himself and his employers alternately, and ended by pleasing nobody. We may feel sure that the *débâcle* of *The Idiot* film will not figure in Kurosawa's career as *Greed* figured in our loss of Stroheim.

For soon after came his great stroke of fortune: *Rashomon* entered the Venice Festival and won its grand prize. I have mentioned the slight circumstance that led to a Kurosawa film being invited there—but what if any other of his works had happened to be sent there and then? Would that audience and those judges have had the same stomach for the talent of Kurosawa in, say, the nearly unprecedented form and uncompromising modern subject of *Drunken Angel*, or the first film made after *Rashomon*—*Living*, with its bureaucrat hero dying of cancer? Would a comparison of these films with *Bicycle*





*Thieves* and *Umberto D.* have helped or hurt them? Did the novel physical beauty of *Rashomon* make Kurosawa's originality seem more acceptable in this than in any of his other films? It serves to recall that the director's most admiring critics in Japan found *Rashomon* "European" in style, in contrast to the Japanese style of his modern subjects, and asserted that the social viewpoint distinguishing all his previous films was missing.<sup>2</sup> But I have heard no Japanese comment on the greatest advantage of *Rashomon* to Kurosawa's career: that its dramatically acquired fame abroad has given him a new freedom of choice at home, at a moment when that freedom was most threatened and when his development most needed it.

# V

Beyond *Rashomon* little interest abroad, either commercially or critically, has been expressed in Kurosawa and his other films. The first American reference to his work appeared in *The Sewanee Review* (Winter, 1950, issue). Donald Richie, a reporter on the *Nippon Times*, has written knowingly about Japanese film audiences (in *Theatre Arts*, March, 1954), and must be better acquainted with Kurosawa's films than this one article indicates. In his *Cahiers du Cinéma* essay, Sadoul's comment on Kurosawa appears to derive wholly from a Japanese informant. In a survey of Japanese films, a Soviet journalist (in *New Times*, May 6th, 1953) gives the only non-Japanese criticism of Kurosawa that I know, but he sums up his career so schematically ("threatened by the reactionaries, baited by the bourgeois press and faced with the prospect of dismissal from the Toho studios, he withdrew from the progressive movement and began to make pictures steeped in gloomy mysticism and frustration") that it is difficult to guess whether the writer has actually seen Kurosawa's films, especially when he refers to the "morbid relativism and studied formalism" (I am quoting

<sup>2</sup> *Rashomon* was not, however, Kurosawa's first film set in the distant past. As early as 1945 he had made *The Men Who Stepped on the Tiger's Tail* (*Tora-no-o o Fumi-otoki-tachi*), but this film was confiscated by the U.S. authorities and returned to the company only with the signing of the peace treaty. It was actually released after *Rashomon's* foreign success (and advertised by the surprised studio as "by the man who made *Rashomon*").



an English translation) of *Rashomon*. Though I have not seen the films made by Kurosawa since *Rashomon*, what I have heard about them gives me confidence to disagree with this journalist when he predicts that Kurosawa's road leads "down into the swamp of reaction where true creative art withers and dies." No, it will be very difficult to defeat the artist who made *Living* (*Ikiru*), a film released early in 1952.

*Living* was written by Kurosawa in collaboration with Shinobu Hashimoto (collaborator on the *Rashomon* script) and Hisaka Aijiro (collaborator on *The Idiot* adaptation). Its setting is "this minute" in Tokyo, and its central figure is a petty bureaucrat, the branch manager of the Welfare Department in one of the city boroughs, and a model of upright and sober behaviour. As he is introduced to us, he has just faced the realisation that his doctor is concealing from him the fact of his approaching death by cancer. Compelled to look anew at his remaining months, he suffers a succession of jolts and makes a series of decisions. He overhears a brutally revealing conversation about himself (and his money) between his son and daughter-in-law, and all the love and respect he felt assured him is suddenly seen as a life-long sham. He reviews other shams and self-deceits of his life—and tries to repair them. The money he has saved for his son will now be spent on joys he never allowed himself to taste. He shares his new pleasures with a young girl in his office—who seems the very essence of the life he is leaving. Together they enter territories that have always been barred to him. His reputation in the office has been that of a rubber-stamp, mechanically affixing a signature to a never-lessening stack of documents on his desk. For the first time in his spotless bureaucratic career, he risks *reading* the papers he has been blindly signing. In the current pile he finds an appeal from some slum mothers for a playground; this seems to him a superlatively legitimate request, and, instead of sending it on through channels, he decides to take it through himself, to make sure it does not die on the way. (My informant tells me that the following sequence is a biting observation of bureaucracy "at work.") He wins the playground for the slum children, and on the evening before its opening makes sure that all the apparatus is in order; alone in the playground at dusk, he sits on a swing, singing a little song, and dies.

Imagine my astonishment when I was told that this concludes only the first third of the film! The last two-thirds are consumed by the bureaucrat's funeral, where each of the mourners remembers the ended life as he or she saw it; among these "versions" of a single life (reminiscent of the contradictory reports in *Rashomon*) are those by the son, the daughter-in-law, the office-girl, other office associates, and the mothers who asked for a playground.

I've given this lengthy synopsis of a film I haven't seen because it seems a high point in that element of Kurosawa's films that will keep them alive—their pity and humanity. It is this that sets them apart from the glossiest and cleverest of his country's films, and from most of the world's film product. Directors in several countries make films akin to Kurosawa's, and these we often group as "neo-realism," an unsatisfactory term for the work of de Sica as well as for Kurosawa. Both men look at their world with personal attitudes that are too sharply defined to fit into any "school," and both have shaped precise artistic forms to embody their views of the world. There

(Continued on page 112)

Akira Kurosawa, photographed on location during the filming of "Seven Samurai."



"Crossways" (1929): one of the most famous of Japanese silent films, made by Teinosuke Kinugasa, the veteran director whose "Gate of Hell" was recently shown in Britain.



## ORIENTAL NOTEBOOK

R. E. Durnat

### 1. Japan

*Rashomon*, *Tora-no-o*, *The Impostor*, *Beauty and the Bandit*, *The Fencing Fighting 36*, *Duel on Sanjogakate Mountain*—these films take us back to the Middle Ages, to a world of ceremonious savagery, a society that seems to represent a dialectic of lusts, tension and ferocity. Savage forces are always ready to break through an imposed static order. *Tora-no-o* exalts bluff and mother wit and is permeated with feudalism; *The Impostor* at least demands that authority produce its credentials, but, once assured of them, its obedience is complete; and *Beauty and the Bandit*—reminiscent in story of von Sternberg's *Saga of Anatahan*—shows the collapse of discipline and order in a primitive tribe when violent jealousies are aroused by a beautiful, promiscuous woman. When the local ruler takes her sister into his harem, almost all the tribe is massacred in an attempt to win her back. Two survivors, jealous suitors, kill her, and, as in *Rashomon*, differing accounts of the same event are given.

Form, story and treatment here create an atmosphere of intense emotional conflict. The two accounts: an abrupt, complex chronology: the long-drawn-out fights in which fortunes continually sway: the girl spurning the warrior and throwing herself at a weakling who is terrified of her, and whom she must overpower by superior strength and wrestling ability: a duel between two suitors, grunting and lunging at each other with flashing steel and weeping with the strength of their mutual love: the two men stalking and murdering the faithless woman in the temple. . . .

There is no romantic shrinking from the fact of stark fear on the part of both combatants, the sweat running into their eyes, white eyeballs bulging with fear. Terror is a part of war; it does not dim the warriors' courage or

the beauty of the ceremony. These bouts are more than demonstrations of exuberant physical virtuosity, of strong and graceful action. They become a physical symbol of emotional tension in the same way as sexual relations. So, terror and exultant triumph are a part of duel and of love scenes. When lovers kiss in *Beauty and the Bandit*, there is no laughter on their faces, but tension and fear of the pleasure that each is feeling. As well caught as this unsatisfying, fascinating ferocity are the graceful manners of the court—the woman's shy advance into the presence of her lord, fan held before her face, head turned aside, eyes downcast. The social function of these films would seem to be to purge spectators of those aggressive instincts in life which are difficult to express, particularly in Oriental countries; and they succeed in purging, unlike so many Western films that actually stimulate what they pretend to relieve.

*The Fencing Fighting 36*, nominally a love comedy, soon becomes more of a conflict between the fathers of the lovers. One often finds in Asiatic and Egyptian pictures that parents steal and retain the centre of the stage. All the fights here are also dances; there is one particularly long, very fast sequence between the young hero's father, the heroine's father, and an Amazonian maid-servant, on a flight of steps. It acquires a quite unbelievable speed, precision and pattern of movement. Otherwise, this is one of many drab, routine pictures emphatically not for export.

*Duel on Sanjogakate Mountain* is throughout very reminiscent of Dreyer. One shot, in fact, might be a classic Dreyer still: the heroine is trussed up with a thick cord wound three times round her flowing robes, and hangs against a cliff-edge over a vast abyss. The other end of the rope is held by the villain. Just projecting into the top of the frame, a sixteenth century pistol with a



"Sword for Hire" : Akira Kurosawa collaborated on the script of this period drama, made in 1952 by Hiroshi Inagaki.

sputtering fuse is pointed at her.

As in most Japanese costume films, the visuals throughout are clear, deliberate, emphatic. Every shot seems a detail clipped from a larger panorama, creating a simultaneous sense of grandeur and intimacy. Where Dreyer looks upon the occult as a symbol for evil in the soul, rather than believing literally in it, in nearly all Japanese costume melodramas it recurs frequently and directly. And, like Dreyer, the Japanese have a palpitating awareness of the ceremonial preceding any form of cruelty.

*Shun-Kong Fights the Ox-King*, a typical fairy story film, combines a general crudity of style with a few long shots reminiscent of Eisenstein. This is full of magic; the evil ox-king possesses a leaf, created by his concubine from her tongue, which suddenly grows to an enormous size and with which he can create a breeze so strong that the heroes are blown miles up into the air. Again the fighting is pure dance. Hero and villain do battle on clouds, accompanied by a sound track of zooming and diving aeroplanes.

While the violence in some of these films seems to provide a secret relief from the courtesy and orderliness of Japanese life, in others one guesses that it testifies to a certain confusion, to a breaking down of discipline. Von Sternberg's *Saga of Anatahan* underlines a similarity between Germany in the 20's and Japan since 1945. After edging his way to the Orient for years, this director arrived at an essentially Japanese story that would have fitted into the Germany of the 20's. There is a certain vogue for *The Blue Angel*-type story in Japan, but traditional morality is always a stronger influence than the negative morality of the Professor-Doktor. In *Tokyo Love Girl* a respectable businessman finds his way backstage at a night-club; chorus girls rushing offstage knock off his hat, then trample on it and him as he kneels to pick it up. (Compare Dietrich to Jannings: "Then you should know enough to take off your hat.") Deserting his family, he becomes a dancer's hanger-on; she first likes then tires of him; the inevitable decline ends with him stabbing her. In a horrifying final sequence she lurches glassy-eyed along a wall, leaving a trail of blood. Both this film and *Bad Girl of Shallowgrass* abound in very efficiently handled Sternbergismus: plumes, balloons, high-heeled shoes,

"Woman of Shanghai" : the American influence seems discernible in this scene from a recent Japanese production.

claustrophobic verticals dominating the compositions, scenes of jealousy and boredom shot through mosquito nets, legs ascending a spiral staircase, lustful old men, insolently smoked cigarettes. In the second film, the chorus girl loves a playwright, who rejects her violent advances and prefers a gentle, traditional Japanese woman whose sister is being blackmailed by a gangster. The chorus girl shoots the gangster, and—rather oddly, for it was in self-defence—waits passively, forebodingly, to be arrested.

## II

Many Japanese films suggest a distinct lack of enthusiasm for American culture, which appears to be regarded primarily as an influence making for moral confusion. Traditionally minded characters are the morally upright ones. There is a scene in *Bad Girl of Shallowgrass* between the playwright and the amorous chorus girl. Attempting to find some way of penetrating the writer's absorption in his work, she prepares tea for him; and in the everyday homage of her lethargic, unskilled but meaningful preparation of the tea, her clumsy gestures contrasted with the exquisite traditional ceremony, she pathetically communicates the broadening of her love, the desire for a fuller kind of contact.

The war films, numerous and popular, often contain direct anti-American references. In *General Yamashita*, *Tiger of Malaya*, the Japanese offensive is represented only by the stoic courage of Kamikaze pilots and the General's personal salutation to each of them as they go off to die. Much of the film deals with the hardships suffered by the General's retreating and outnumbered army, and women and children also seeking safety from the omnipresent American bombers. A hunger-crazed soldier catches a snake, and eats it alive; a woman goes mad; there are lurid shots of dismembered hands and arms after a B-17 raid, the wounded and exhausted fleeing into the forest as bombers roar overhead. The final scenes show a nervous, fidgety American war-crimes prosecutor demanding the death penalty for Yamashita on the ground that, although







"Nigorie" ("Squalor"), an episodic film directed by Tadashi Imai and based on three stories by the Japanese writer Ichiyo Higuchi. The title story (left) deals with the life of prostitutes; "Moon" (right) is an unsentimental account of an unhappy wife's conflict between love and duty to her family.

no atrocity could be attributed to his orders, he was responsible for all crimes committed by men under his command. The General, who has held his army together by the example of his own courage, scarcely condescends to defend himself at the trial, as this would be beneath his dignity; the film seems to imply that, in such circumstances, no general could be held responsible for crimes committed by his men in their despair. *The Battleship Yamato* (Yamato is a traditional name for Japan), about a battleship going down heroically against overwhelming odds, is framed by shots of survivors clinging to wreckage as enemy aircraft machine-gun them. The Captain is shown drinking with his men, who esteem him highly, and personally intervening to prevent even a minor case of bullying. The benevolence of this paternalism suggests that democracy is unnecessary in Japan because of the reciprocal sense of responsibility between superiors and inferiors; it compares interestingly with the atmosphere of brutality and resentment in recent films of American army life, an atmosphere generated by injustices that the Japanese would take for granted. The accusation of atrocity and moral hypocrisy against the Americans is most passionately expressed in *Children of Hiroshima*, a vivid and remarkable film that goes beyond the immediate situation to remind us that all arguments concerning morality and restraint in warfare are now of purely historical interest.

### III

Amongst the most perceptive and individual of recent Japanese films is *Lady Chatterley's Lover of Japan*, based on a pre-war novel of that title. An officer is made impotent by a wound; in the infidelity of a moment, his upright and loving wife gives herself to the sly, passionate artist who has been commissioned to paint her portrait. The fruit of this infidelity is a daughter, dearly loved by both the officer and her mother. Growing up to adolescence, she learns part of the truth; and then her mother tells her the whole story and asks her forgiveness. The Japanese like the flashback device because it enables you to cut back at any moment to the framework so that your characters can comment on any part of the action. The film has many poignant and beautiful moments: the husband, striving with physical exercises to keep up the appearance of virility, when really his heart and pride are broken; his wife massaging his back, and, like forlorn

dreams, the smoke-rings drifting from his mouth, diffusing, wafting away; the artist on a hot summer's night, picking from the wife's face a gossamer cobweb drift. Despite its catchpenny title, the film could hardly be further in spirit from Lawrence's novel. The daughter, dressed like an American teenager, still has the traditional Japanese mentality that Lawrence would have hated. This is a mellow and compassionate work; and one hopes that, like *Four Chimneys* and *Children of Hiroshima*, it will be shown in London as a contrast to the period films which find their material in history and legend.

## 2. Hong Kong

Now filled with emigré artists from Shanghai and the mainland, with a market extending from Madagascar to San Francisco provided by Chinese living overseas, Hong Kong is one of the world's leading film production centres.

Little attempt is made to compete with Hollywood. In Hong Kong itself, only the more sophisticated native features find their way to cinemas patronised by Europeans, and are poorly supported by English audiences, partly on principle, partly through inability to appreciate them. At the smaller but numerous vernacular houses, however, western films are shown on a one-performance basis only, whereas Chinese films, though their dialogue is usually in Mandarin—which necessitates subtitling—run for about a week. Most popular western imports are Tarzan and jungle pictures. Children in the street play more often at the ceremonial sword-fighting of Chinese opera than at cowboys.

Of the more than thirty small companies in Hong Kong, the most ambitious are Great Wall Movie Enterprises, Yung Hwa Studios and Grandview productions, the latter specialising in adaptations from operas, several of which are now being produced in colour. A 3-D film, which I did not see, was made last year. The star system is fully developed; the marriage of the actor Fu Che to a young starlet occasioned a twenty-minute newsreel, and most leading companies produce their own luxurious magazines; pleasantness of feature, elegance of dress, are considered more important than exposed limbs. Financially, the companies seem to oscillate in traditional fashion between opulence and precariousness. China is now closed, and Formosa almost, to Hong Kong films.

(Continued on page 84)



## ***Akira Kurosawa***

“Seven Samurai,” Kurosawa’s first period film since “Rashomon,” tells a story, set in the far distant past, of seven warriors who offer their services to help the poor and the oppressed. Takashi Shimura (above) is a member of Kurosawa’s regular “stock company,” and played the wood-cutter in “Rashomon.”







Akira Kurosawa's "Rashomon," Grand Prix winner at Venice in 1951, introduced the post-war Japanese cinema to Europe, and remains the best-known of the dozen or so Japanese films since shown in London, at European festivals and elsewhere. Toshiro Mifune (the bandit) has played in most of Kurosawa's films; Machiko Kyo (the wife) appears also in "Gate of Hell" and in "Ugetsu Monegatari."

Most of them are in Mandarin dialogue, a few in Cantonese.

Two main types of films are produced. The stories drawn from the vast repertoire of opera, usually set in the past with love or patriotism in conflict with the rigid Confucian family system, or with corruption and intrigue, move in the world of Emperors and high officials. The present-day films, usually humorous and tolerant, deal with family problems, matrimonial misunderstandings, young love, the cost of living (themes of ambition are conspicuously absent).

With the present political situation still in mind, the theme of dedicated patriotism opposed to corruption or tyranny, or both, is embodied in *General Chai and Lady Balsam*, *Dawn of China's Revolution*, *A Torn Lily*, *The Peerless Beauty*, *Lady from the Moon*, set variously in the 1900's, in 900 A.D., in 200 B.C., and in "a time so ancient that peace and tranquillity had reigned the world." *A Torn Lily*, shown at the 1953 Edinburgh Festival, beautifully evokes in its first half the life of a Sing Song girl who has learnt "to draw . . . to play music . . . and to smile at men whom I disliked." Her love for the weak Wang Qwai, a man whom we know is weak enough to betray her, her actions of bringing him tea while he studies, preparing his ink, telling him that the hour is late, are invested with a sacramental dignity and beauty. Thereafter the plot develops rather slowly, though its climax is ruthless; passages of the most exquisite beauty alternate with (to us) tedious episodes set in the court.

The power of this and other Chinese films in a similar style stems considerably from the acting, which resembles that of Japanese films and of Pudovkin's work. Many of the leading actors learned their profession on the stage; their style, based as it is on a mask-like countenance, has its nearest western counterpart in the great screen clowns. It seems strange that the subtlest form of acting should be that in which the face is, as it were, masked. But the discipline essential to this style demands an omission of all unnecessary, all involuntary, movement, so that the smallest change of expression becomes an event and bears a special weight of meaning. Unfortunately, unlike the Japanese, the Chinese film-makers have not yet found a compromise between this form of mime and the necessity in the cinema for expressive physical action; their films concentrate almost exclusively on the actor, their scenarios on dialogue scenes, unvarying in tempo. Camerawork, composition, lighting, cutting, in the more expensive films are efficient but academic; in the cheaper films, drab and flat.

As a result, these films contain individual scenes that are outstanding, but in the long run boredom sets in. For instance, in *General Chai and Lady Balsam* there is an exemplary conversation scene between the patriotic Sing Song girl (Lee Li-Hwa) and the visiting General (Yen Chun) who, distrusting her, keeps up a pretence of having renounced all revolutionary zeal and sold out to corruption. She will not believe him, and the battle of insinuations and personalities, the beguilement and the duplicity that follows is fascinating. *Dawn of China's Revolution* contains an impressive sequence of the torture, trial and imprisonment by the Manchus of another patriotic woman. *Lady from the Moon*, a spectacular fantasy under the Japanese influence, has superb location photography; the peasant characterisations are full of vitality; and the bearded archer with the buccaneering laugh reminds us of the bandit in *Rashomon*. Hou Yi saves the kingdom from the nine scorching suns by shooting them down with his arrows, and becomes king. He is beloved of the peasant heroine, but absolute power soon corrupts him, and a wise man advises his concubine to kill him. He finally dies roaring with laughter at the irony of his own

death, pitied, in spite of everything, by the spirit of his first love as she is wafted up towards the moon. . . . This ambitious film contains a journey round the moon (tinted green), whose inhabitants exist on a longevity drug, and some beautiful reconstructions of folk dancing. The various elements, political and fantastic, are skilfully interwoven; the heroic archer, corrupted by power, represents Communism, the profiteering merchant who, in another sequence, buys up all the grain so that during a famine the peasants starve, is an obviously significant figure. The result, not surprisingly, is wildly uneven, but the film has moments of undeniable imagination and a genuine feeling for the past.

*The Unfinished Love* and *The Peerless Beauty* deal in a more intimate fashion with history. Interestingly, the kindness, sensibility and good breeding of the prince-heroes are their most important qualities, and a favourite character (as in many Japanese films) is the warrior in the service of a refined and gentle lord. The women are custodians of integrity and idealism; the theme of self-sacrifice is common. These period films are usually tragedies, pregnant with a sense of downfall and suffering, in contrast to the films of present-day family life, which are imbued with tolerance and cheerfulness. After seeing a few of them, one has the feeling that stories of ancient kings and queens lend themselves to a symbolism of the will to emotional power, the possibility of imposing oneself on circumstances. Pretensions bring a Promethean fall, and kings are as bound to the "system" as poor woodcutters. Conversely, idealism is always associated with suffering.

## II

The conflict between love and Confucian family loyalties has always been to the Chinese theatre what the conflict between love and honour was to classical French literature. *The Unfinished Love* (most of which is unbearably tedious) has an extraordinary scene of a whole family kneeling on the floor to lift the chains around their father's ankles, the daughter seizing his arm to stamp, forcibly, his seal on a document that will free him and enslave her. Two films of novels by Pa Kin, *Springtime* and *Autumn*, duplicate this author's hysterical emotionalism in stories of the revolt of the young against authoritarian elders. In *Merry-Go-Round*, *A Love Story* and *Tales of the City* (all of which, though repetitious, have freshness and charm, and are Chinese counterparts of *The Marrying Kind* or *Edouard et Caroline*), marital problems and differences are solved generally through parental intervention. Some films of Communist outlook (two theatres in Hong Kong specialise in Communist pictures) provide a variation on these themes. *Bright-Hued Phoenix Fly Away* has a carpenter who loves a girl and understands machinery, contrasts the simple and happy poor with the ruthless, hypocritical rich, and emphasises the cruelty of a fat mother-in-law to a peasant girl. In *True Love and New Love*, the young capitalist and his wife heartily detest each other and embark on separate love affairs; bebop music is used to evoke the Americanisation of the rich. Their prospective victims, however, find happiness with each other, and, with a group of friends, become contented workers in a textile factory.

It is a pity that hardly any of these films is suitable for export. Like Indian films, they have a convention of their own, most notably the habit of suddenly breaking off into song, which acts as a soliloquy on the action. (The infiltration of Western music and orchestration can provide bizarre effects, as in *General Chai* and *Dawn of China's Revolution*, both of which at moments feature Viennese waltzes.) With cutting, *Merry-Go-Round* and *Tales of the City* might find an audience here; but most of the period films are of distinctly specialised interest.





"On the Waterfront": Marlon Brando and Eva Marie Saint.

## Film Reviews

### ON THE WATERFRONT

Reviewed by Penelope Houston

Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (Columbia) is a significant, almost a definitive, example of a type of film which traditionally finds Hollywood at its most expert: the melodrama with a stiffening of serious ideas, the journalistic exposé of crime and corruption. Its subject harks back to the racket-smashing thrillers of the 'thirties; its style—location shooting, conscientious concern with surface realism—belongs to the present decade; its pretensions, the attempt to build authentic drama out of an investigation of waterfront gangsterism, are characteristic not only of the director but of a whole school of Hollywood thought.

The film's central character, Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando), is a young man in his late twenties, once a boxer, now an aimless hanger-on in the retinue of Johnny Friendly (Lee J. Cobb), the corrupt union boss who imposes gangster law on the New York waterfront. Terry is involved in the murder of a recalcitrant docker who has threatened to speak out against Friendly; he falls in love with the victim's sister; a Catholic priest works, deliberately, on his slowly awakened conscience; the murder of his brother, Friendly's lieutenant, gives him a motive of personal revenge, and he agrees to testify before the Crime Commission. The sequel to this action is a savage beating up and an almost symbolic conclusion, as the dockers wait for Terry—his face smashed in, his walk a blind, lurching shamle—to lead them back to work. Taking his background material from Malcolm Johnson's Pulitzer Prize winning articles, Budd Schulberg has written a script which is vigorous, credible, at times (in the scenes between Terry and the girl) authentically touching, and which, though it has its over-conventional elements in the characterisation of Friendly and of the priest, never falls into the familiar, specious habit of "dignifying" its working class

characters by making them speak in pseudo-Biblical language.

The script, in fact, contains the basis for a sharply observed journalistic investigation of a man's slow realisation of the truth about his environment, and Marlon Brando's playing gives the film the opportunity to become something rather more than this. This is a strong, confident performance, wholly contemporary in feeling and taking us right away from the old, chip on the shoulder thug-hero on the Hemingway model. The battered prize fighter's face, the slouching walk, the shoulder-shrugging gestures completing half-spoken sentences, the cocksure, gum-chewing arrogance and the gentle, uncertain half-smile are all used to unerring effect; as he walks in the park with the girl, aimlessly pulling on her glove while they talk, or makes it clear to his brother (admirably played by Rod Steiger) that his betrayal of the gang is irrevocable, relationships are crystallised, situations exist, as it were, outside their screen context. Although the playing otherwise is less satisfactory—Eva Marie Saint is gauche and adequately appealing as the wanly courageous heroine, but Karl Malden gives a strident, unrelaxed performance as the priest, and Lee J. Cobb's blustering gang leader is a conventionally over-drawn figure—Brando's performance gives the film a wonderfully firm centre.

Kazan, however, not content to let the story develop its own impetus, tends to over-inflate the simplest situation, to build up an atmosphere of artificial tension and urgency. Abetted by Leonard Bernstein's score, which undoubtedly contributes forcefully to the mood of the film, he has gone all out for the raucous, aggressive, showy effect. The virtuosity of Kazan's handling, the skill with which he sets a scene of violence, are not in doubt; one does, however, question the validity of his methods and of his approach. This seems to derive directly from the Group Theatre tradition (it is worth recording, incidentally, that Kazan, Karl Malden and Lee J. Cobb all appeared in the Theatre's 1937 production of *Golden Boy*), from the depression period of the 'thirties

when the New York stage discovered "realism" and playwrights such as Odets created the man-in-the-street hero, semi-articulate, inevitably victimised, reaching vaguely for higher and gentler things. (The Golden Boy had his violin; Terry, the reluctant thug, keeps pigeons.) The influence, now more than a little jaded, persists in the attitude to character, in the insistence that ordinary people are remarkable and must somehow be made to appear so, in the sentimentalising of the tough guy (Schulberg, too, has always a soft spot for the broken-down boxer)

During recent years, Hollywood "realism" has developed its own immediately recognisable conventions and attitudes. A now familiar technique of handling actors demands those mannerisms—Karl Malden's check in mid-speech, for instance—always just a little too studied for naturalism. There is the cunningly employed under-statement, so that a scene of violence and tension ends with the priest demonstrating the human touch by ordering a glass of beer. And it seems symptomatic that, as in the Hollywood-influenced *Terminal Station*, location shooting no longer guarantees an appearance of actuality. In spite of Boris Kaufman's beautifully atmospheric camerawork, recording the pale, cold early morning light on the docks, the depressed back streets and dismal little parks, the scenes are so carefully set, the characters so deliberately grouped (as in the saloon interior, with the two comatose down-and-outs propped picturesquely against the staircase), that we seem to have reached a point halfway between the studio and the real. It is a long way from the rougher idioms of *The Naked City*, though perhaps Kazan's own *Panic in the Streets* was already moving in this direction.

Primarily, however, one distrusts this sort of convention because, in making it too easy to create a plausible seeming surface, a set of characters who will be accepted for their familiarity, it inevitably encourages evasion. In *On the Waterfront*, there is a scene in which Terry has to tell the girl of his part in her brother's murder: as they speak, their voices are drowned by a bellowing ship's siren. If the picture were presented as no more than melodrama, the trick would seem acceptable enough; but in building up his subject as he has, Kazan has foregone his right to evade so crucial a stage in this particular relationship. In a sense, the incident may be taken to sum up the film: excitement is whipped up, attitudes are struck, but the incidental detail blots out the human situation and—though it is not for want of trying—the transition from melodrama to drama is never made.



## THE ADVENTURES OF ROBINSON CRUSOE

Reviewed by Lindsay Anderson

The emergence—or the re-emergence—of Luis Bunuel in these last two years or so has been a strange and wonderful thing. Not that it is unknown for names of bygone celebrity to pop up as if from nowhere, but generally these resurrections have been more sad than joyful: Dupont is rediscovered in Hollywood as director of *The Scarf*; Von Sternberg suddenly reappears directing Jane Russell in *Macao*; Boris Kaufman, whose name will shine for ever on the credits of *Zéro de Conduite* and *L'Atalante*, shoots *On the Waterfront* for Kazan. But Bunuel surprises us the other way, with continual revelation. *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* is a film by an artist of fresh, still developing talent, a poetic film, with a purity of style that marks it as the statement of a man of integrity, direct, uncompromised.

It is particularly marvellous because, though the film is a wholly personal work, Bunuel did not himself want to make it; or rather it was not his original idea to make it. "I didn't like the book; but I liked the character. I accepted it because there is a certain purity about him. Above all this is man face to face with nature: nothing romantic about it, no facile novelettish love scenes, no plot. . . ." Readers of *SIGHT AND SOUND* will remember Tony Richardson's revealing article in the January issue: further light on Bunuel is shed by the long and delightful interview with him in the June issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, from which I quote. "There's simply a chap who arrives, finds himself face to face with nature, and has to feed himself. Well, I liked the subject, I took it on, and I tried to do something that might be interesting. . . ." The approach could not be better described. In fact so simple, so inevitable are the images, that you have to imagine what the conventional film treatment of the story would be to appreciate quite how daring—and how masterly—is Bunuel's naked, unadorned presentation of the simple facts. No jolly establishing sequences at Plymouth, no sentimental farewells, no pretty Polly waving a handkerchief from the jetty, not even a smashing storm sequence: just long waves rolling in to a deserted beach, and a man staggering up out of the water.

"Simply a chap. . . ." This precisely is the impression we first get of Crusoe as Dan O'Herlihy presents him. A good-looking chap, rather than strikingly handsome; alert, clear-eyed, ordinarily pleasant rather than obviously heroic. At first we wonder whether he is going to be able to sustain this taxing role. But soon we forget our doubts, forget even to admire: plainly, unheroically, ingeniously he sets to work—builds his stockade, grows his corn, goes hunting with his beloved dog, makes pottery, wins his battle against nature. This just is Crusoe.

The first reels of the film are like the best kind of documentary—like *Moana*, with its loving, contented observation of the practical details of living. Then comes the second theme, of solitude. "I also wanted to tackle the subject of Love . . . that's to say the lack of love or friendship: man without the fellowship of man or woman." Bunuel emphasises the terrible loneliness of his hero with vivid scenes of hallucination—staged with the utmost economy. The flapping of the woman's dress with which Crusoe has clothed his scarecrow becomes a torment to him: he dashes to the hilltop from which he knows his cries will re-echo, a bitter parody of companionship. The build-up to this wonderful scene has apparently been severely cut: it remains a most powerful invention.

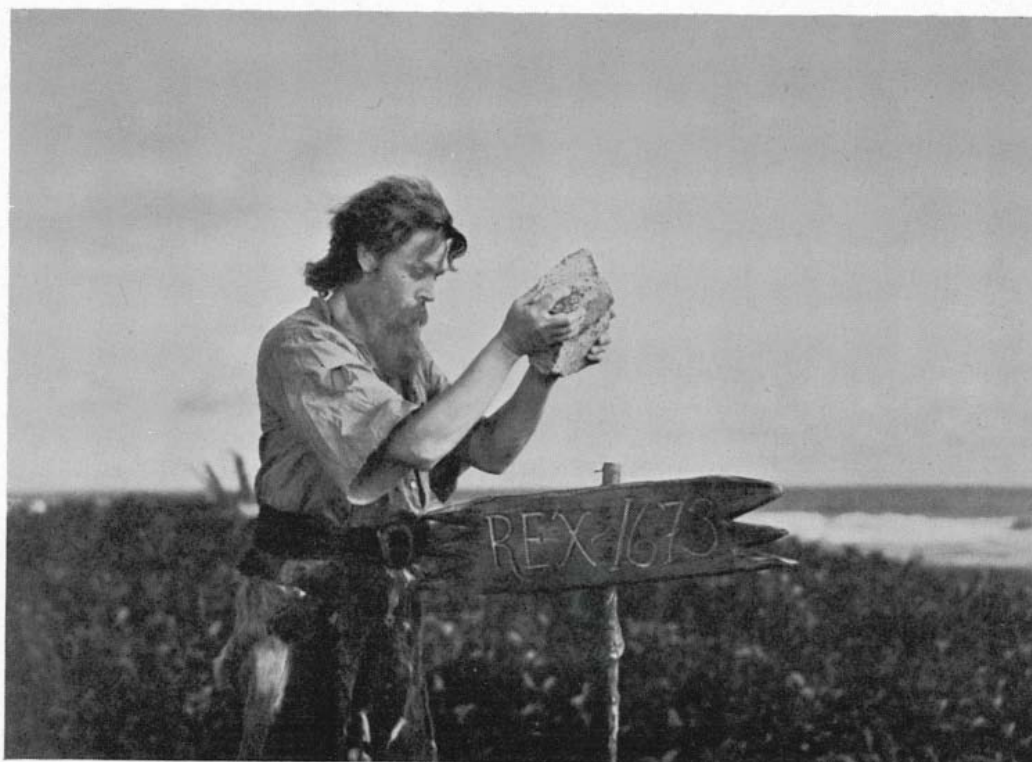
If O'Herlihy were not so excellent from the start, one would be tempted to say his performance gets better and better. He manages the transition to the eccentric Crusoe of the goatskin umbrella and the shaggy hat with the greatest skill. (Tony Richardson wrote of Crusoe at this stage as "a wayward, crazed old man," and others have described his "degeneration." I found him most humorously sympathetic.) And further riches follow: excitement with the cannibals, tender comedy with Man Friday.

The scenes with Friday are a development of that second

Laurence Harvey and Susan Shentall in "Romeo and Juliet", Grand Prix winner at Venice, which opens in London too late for review in this issue.



"Adventures of Robinson Crusoe": Crusoe (Dan O'Herlihy) marks the grave of his Alsatian dog, Rex.



theme, of loneliness. Crusoe and Friday have to learn to live together: Crusoe is suspicious—not unreasonably after all—and Friday frightened and bewildered. (James Fernandez' performance of this noble savage is perfect: funny and beautiful at the same time.) The delicate humour with which these scenes are presented, Friday's dignity and naïf wisdom, Crusoe's shame, the warmth of their eventual "*grande fraternité humaine*" (Bunuel's words)—all these must surely astonish those who had docketed this director in their minds as a harsh and cruel experimentalist, fascinated exclusively by the violent and the depraved.

But of course there has never been any doubt of Bunuel's great love of life and the living. It has made him angry in the past; in this film it makes him reflective, observant, gentle, stirring but never inflamed. "*J'ai accepté parcequ'il y a en lui quelquechose de pur.*" *Robinson Crusoe* is a salute from one pure spirit to another.

## INDISCRETION

Reviewed by Gavin Lambert

The history of what has emerged as *Indiscretion* (Selznick-United Artists) on the posters (and *Indiscretion of an American Wife* with, in smaller letters below, *Terminal Station*, on the credits) is one of those sad muddles peculiar to the cinema. Zavattini's original story was developed by Luigi Chiarini and Giorgio Prosperi. Then Autant-Lara decided to make the film, with Gérard Philipe and Ingrid Bergman in mind, and Aurenche and Bost wrote a new treatment. Marlon Brando was substituted for Philipe, Autant-Lara abandoned the project, and David Selznick bought the story rights. De Sica agreed to direct the film, with Jennifer Jones and Montgomery Clift.

Truman Capote (brought in after Paul Gallico and Carson McCullers had done stints) earns the official credit for the American dialogue. As de Sica's knowledge of English was imperfect, Selznick retained the right to approve the dialogue while the director had the last word on the "story." For the rest, de Sica had G. R. Aldo again as cameraman, Cicognini to write the music, and a supporting cast of Italian players.

Without having read Zavattini's original story, one cannot know how radically the change of nationality imposed on his two leading characters may have affected it. On the surface, one would guess, not much. For its situation—a married woman on holiday in Italy, who has had a brief affair with a young man, decides to give him up and safeguard her

marriage for her young daughter's sake, is saying good-bye to her lover at the Terminal Station in Rome before catching the train that will take her home—seems flexible enough. Clearly, all depends on the dialogue, which has to create the characters, imply the background of the affair, make the predicament through which they are living real; in fact, to determine the "story." Granted some good writing, and satisfactory casting, something worthwhile could have been made from the subject.

Unfortunately, what one critic has called the "diminutive hand" of Truman Capote—aided at times, perhaps, by the rather larger one of Selznick?—has allowed the lovers to utter in the accents of the Higher Novelette. The talk is expensive verbal confectionery, tastefully wrapped and soft-centred. It was a mistake to make the lover half-Italian and then cast Montgomery Clift, for this actor cannot suggest a Latin temperament. His performance, so far as it goes, is careful and sensitive, though committed to a single note of passive, breathless suffering. But Jennifer Jones, Diored from toe to tippet, appears at the mercy of nervous tics rather than emotional stress.

One can see, at moments, Zavattini's original idea coming through—how almost every little incident somehow conspires to draw the lovers away from each other, into the world outside, how they are finally driven to a humiliating attempt at privacy for their last moments—but de Sica's staging of these scenes seems as adroitly false as Aldo's photography, which imposes a production "gloss" over the vividness of the actual location. An impersonal smoothness, in fact, has worn the life out of everything, most of all out of some fine talents that one hopes, next time, will be working in happier circumstances.

## THE GORKI TRILOGY

Reviewed by Basil Wright

The Gorki trilogy (Gala), together with *The Village Teacher* and *Children of the Soviet Arctic*, has (or should have) established Mark Donskoi as one of the world's top film-makers. He is a deep one—and deep ones are rare in cinema.

The trilogy consists of *The Childhood of Maxim Gorki* (1938), *My Apprenticeship*, also known as *Out in the World* (1939), and *My Universities* (1940). The first two of these, produced at the Children's Film Studio, are in fact one immense film split in two. The third, dealing with Gorki's early manhood, differs in many respects from the other two, although the production team (Ermolov, camera—Stepanov,

art direction—Schwartz, music) remains the same throughout. But all three parts represent a remarkable achievement in solving the problems of putting on the screen not merely a biography, but also an autobiography.

It was necessary for Donskoi to find the means of presenting personally not only what Gorki was revealing in his passionately human autobiographical notes, but also Gorki himself—no longer talking behind the scenes, but taking part. First person had to be transferred to third. Moreover, since an autobiography tends to be more episodic (outside the continuum represented by the mood and character of the author) than a biography carefully planned *post facto* and from outside, the whole quality of the films was bound to depend on the director identifying himself with the author while at the same time converting the literary expression into terms of movie. Catherine de la Roche, whose admirable article on Donskoi in *Sequence Five* is one of the few pieces of documentation available in English, remarks that "*Donskoi's theme is Gorki's theme, and the diverse stories he has chosen for filming, before and since, touched on one or other of its aspects.*"

All it comes to is this—that Donskoi, like Gorki, is able to see all people, good and bad alike, as human beings. The great quality of this trilogy is that it contains no ideological types. Donskoi, with Gorki, reveals that it is not only wicked to be wicked: it is also sad.

The first two parts of the trilogy are in fact dominated by Gorki's grandparents—the man vain, stupid, brutal and hysterical, the woman an image of eternal simplicity, instinctively understanding what life is, and able to describe it as beautiful in the moment of her greatest suffering. The playing of these two (Trojanovski and Massalitinova) is a rare privilege to observe. Thanks to the grandfather's frenzied stupidity, we see the family in a steady decline—and against this movement towards poverty and destitution the boy Gorki reacts, constantly seeking escape, seeking above all the rescue which can come from education.

Donskoi has constructed these films entirely with the aim of pointing and contrasting this conflict between the boy's ambition and the fatal course of events in which it is so nearly submerged. He takes a series of episodes and treats them in two ways—either elaborating them into long and carefully constructed sequences (which form the backbone of the work), or, in contrast, using an extraordinary filmic shorthand which makes a momentary but exceedingly cogent impact—the long shot for instance in which the young apprentice falls and is crushed by the huge Cross he is carrying along the ridge of a hill: *one shot only*. To this, especially in the first two parts, he adds the domination of the "majestic river," the great Volga, with its constant traffic and the din of sirens which, even more than Schwartz's admirable music, becomes the theme-song. Over and over again Donskoi brings his characters to the banks of the Volga for sequences of great import; and, of course, there are the episodes on the river itself. In one, where the boy Gorki is a dishwasher on a Volga steamer, the cook, an immensely fat and sentimental character, sits entranced as the boy reads *Taras Bulba* aloud to him, while the sneakthief waiter throws the washed glasses back into the swill-bin. In another (Part III) the desire of man for the simple dignity of a job is superbly shown in a long sequence where the down-and-outs get unexpected employment in unloading sacks of grain from a sinking barge. It is raining torrentially, but as they work on (in a sequence remarkable for the rhythm of its cutting) a watery sun breaks through the clouds, and they salute it as the mythological heroes of the past might salute Phoebus in his chariot.

Donskoi uses camera movement—often very complicated—with absolute mastery. He has a penchant, too, for ramming home a point by the use of high-angle long-shots. This is especially evident in the two fairground scenes (Part I) and in the extraordinarily powerful sequence (Part II) in which two drunken Cossacks fight in a public square about God and the Tsar. The improbability, but at the same time the absolute rightness, of the angles in this sequence can only be compared with the work of Dovzhenko in *Earth* and *Shors*.

The immense richness of episode and detail in the first two parts of the film is, as I have said, saved from chaos by the characters of the grandparents and by the Volga image. As *My Apprenticeship* ends, all these elements are brought together. Young Gorki is leaving his grandparents for ever, and as the huge paddle-steamer pulls away from the jettv.

grandfather, senilely childish, ignores the implications, while grandmother smiles and waves and says: "*I shall never see you again.*"

In the third part, *My Universities*, there is a considerable change in style, and the film considered as a whole is far less satisfactory. The episodic quality is no longer concealed; indeed Donskoi uses a very large number of linking subtitles which become irksome. The character of Gorki himself, which up till now has been played almost perfectly by the boy actor Lyarsky, is now taken over by the adult Valberg, who has neither the same acting ability nor the same sympathetic quality. Save in a few sequences, Gorki becomes too much of a lay figure. Moreover *My Universities* is constricted in space. Apart from the barge sequence at the beginning, and an end sequence to which reference will be made later, the film is often painfully claustrophobic. In a sense this may be deliberate, since it is mainly concerned with the famous bakery, and Donskoi is no doubt right in locking us up with the workers in the stuffiness and the flour-dust. But when we emerge, it is only to be locked up—less justifiably—with the liberal intellectuals (whom Gorki learns to despise) in their equally stuffy parlours.

And yet the bakery sequences give us what must be the finest screen character since Raimu in *La Femme du Boulanger*. Semyonov, the boss (played by Kayukov), an upstart with a simple cunning and a cunning simplicity, is unforgettable. There he is, in a striped night-gown, fondling his prize pigs in the yard, hurt and upset when his attempts to act the bully end in Gorki twisting his ear. There he is, arguing with Gorki at midnight among the sleeping bakers, trying to find out why this youth who is causing so much trouble won't accept the simple "fact" of exploiter and exploited; matching his own cunning against Gorki's determination and never for a moment thinking of sacking him. The culminating sequence, where the men stage a walk-out, and are joined by their boss while they are celebrating in the local pub, represents one of the most exquisite moments in all cinema.

Thereafter *My Universities* loses grip. The ideas behind the sequences of Gorki's attempted suicide, and the subsequent period in hospital, are quite admirable—but one senses in Donskoi's direction a certain, and perhaps understandable, fatigue. And the final sequence, in which Gorki helps to deliver a peasant woman of her baby on the shores of a great lake, only shows us what Donskoi was trying to do, but has not, alas, achieved in this instance. The immense images of the ocean smashing itself against the rocks with which he intercuts the woman's labour are magnificent to look at, but are too obviously symbolic; they are no substitute for the vastness, the superabundant permeations of life, with which the Volga inundates the early parts of this magnificent trilogy. For, whatever its faults, it is magnificent, and as in the reading of Pushkin and Turgenev, Dostoevski and Tolstoi, so in the seeing of these three Donskoi films you are filled with a great love for the Russian people. Which, at this stage in world affairs, may not be a bad thing.

## THE CAINE MUTINY

Reviewed by Lewis Ballan

Whether facility is to be considered a dangerous or an enviable gift depends on the point of view of the assessor. In a sense how admirable are the vast, minutely worked surfaces of these long American novels, of which Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny* is a fine example: capably written, brilliantly dialogued, ingeniously constructed; the attitude hard-boiled, knowingly disenchanted; the appetite and the capacity for detail apparently limitless. Books of this kind, particularly when their sales have been immense, inevitably fascinate film producers, yet they can present problems. Their disenchantment, if not profound, is still generally too disturbing for the mass audience to whom their appeal must be extended. (Three and a half million copies of *The Caine Mutiny* have been sold, the publishers tell us; but the film must appeal, or at least be inoffensive, to a public even larger and less discriminating.) And of course the condensation into two hours of playing time of action which it has taken an author five hundred pages to describe is liable to set the screenwriter a formidable task of reshaping.

From what one has heard of its Broadway production, it appears that *The Caine Mutiny* made a strong, exciting play.



"The Childhood of Maxim Gorki."



It has not been so expertly translated into film. The theatrical adaptation plucked the essential drama from the novel and concentrated on it: the play concerns itself exclusively with the court martial of Captain Queeg. Stanley Roberts, on the other hand, who scripted the film, has chosen to follow the structure of the book, starting with young Ensign Keith's graduation from Naval Academy, sketching the emotional complications between him and his mother and his girl, following him on to the *Caine*, preserving the original continuity of the events leading up to the "mutiny," and relating them intermittently to Keith's emotional development. The script skips, condenses and dilutes; it does not reshape.

Dramatically, this decision was certainly unwise: if ever there was a case for concentration—perhaps for flashback construction—this was surely it. For the appeal of *The Caine Mutiny* is, or should be, primarily that of suspense, like a good thriller. What sort of a man is Queeg? What is the explanation of his conduct? Will he get away with it? Even in the novel, Keith soon becomes tiresome, his trite emotional worries no more than resented intrusions into the proper business of the story. In the film one resents them even more. The inevitable watering-down of Keith's problems makes them even more banal, pointless except as "love-interest" thrown in to satisfy the most conventional notions of what is "box-office." To avoid (presumably) giving a different kind of offence, the naval backgrounds too are less sharp, less candid than they are in the book. Only the central situation remains effective.

This is largely due to the excellence of the story, which survives splendidly in spite of the indifferent organisation of the script, and to Humphrey Bogart's brilliant performance as Queeg. His playing captures exactly the combined pathos and insupportable unreason of that memorable character—the martinet's façade, the neurotic tension behind it, the slyness and cunning that finally disintegrate into self-delusion and hysteria. The rest of the acting is unequal. Van Johnson and Robert Francis are adequate as the honest Maryk and the greenhorn Keith; Fred MacMurray is strangely and disastrously miscast as Keefer, the irresponsible, "intellectual" smarty-boots; and Jose Ferrer, in a cold and rather arrogant performance, makes only the most obvious points in the role of the defending counsel. In the supporting cast, Tom Tully is outstandingly good as Queeg's weary predecessor on the *Caine*.

*The Caine Mutiny* is directed by Edward Dmytryk in an unadventurous, conformist fashion, efficient in the action sequences but without much style. It is, indeed, more of a producer's than a director's picture, and Stanley Kramer has

done his best to provide something for everybody. Just enough of the central situation is preserved to keep the film dramatically on its feet; there is a very good storm sequence; a night-club scene, with a song; a romantic idyll in glorious mountain scenery; a winsome "happy ending" to bring the whole thing to a smiling, stirring close. Periodically throughout the story there are shots of the *Caine* at sea, entering and leaving harbour, which provide Max Steiner with the opportunity to show what a thumping good naval march he can compose when duty calls. On leaving the cinema with this in one's ears, one half-expects an enlistment form for the U.S. Navy to be thrust into one's hand.

## REAR WINDOW and DIAL M FOR MURDER

Reviewed by Derwent May

Gracelessness is the word one wants to describe the over-all quality of Alfred Hitchcock's latest film, *Rear Window*; and no word could be sadder. For what are the qualities that we associate with classic Hitchcock if not, precisely, the elegance of proportion, the ease and sureness of manner? Here, however, the unevenness runs from beginning to end, the intermittent brilliances and delicacies serve only to emphasise it.

*Rear Window* has a situation which promises intricacy and then fails to provide it. L. B. (Jeff) Jefferies (James Stewart), an adventurous magazine photographer, is confined to his flat with a broken leg, and in his boredom is taking a slightly impertinent interest in the neighbours whose windows and terraces confront him. One sleepless night he watches the strange comings and goings of a man in one of the lighted flats opposite—a man whose once-nagging wife is next day nowhere to be seen. He is convinced that he has stumbled on a murder, and detail on detail seems to confirm it until his sceptical girl-friend (Grace Kelly) and his *masseuse* (Thelma Ritter) are convinced and the three of them begin to investigate. The climax is traditionally tense: there *has* been a murder, the girl-friend is almost murdered too, across the yard under Jefferies' eyes, he himself fights off the murderer, divertingly, with a flash-bulb—but the unpredictable twist in the plot that one is depending upon never comes. Most of the other neighbours, with whom we have made acquaintance more painstakingly (following a drooping and lurching camera) than delightedly, are left uninvolved. Hitchcock seems as much interested in the technical problem he has set himself—the audience sees, across the yard, only what Jefferies can see—as in the story; but long-range spying on the neighbours



"The Young Lovers": the American (David Knight), the girl (Odile Versois) and her father (David Kossoff) meet by chance on the Underground

can become monotonous, and the edge is taken off the central situation.

The thriller, too, leans back for long stretches on a rather half-hearted plot of love and character: Jefferies doubting until this happens whether his society girl-friend is adaptable enough to enjoy being married to him. James Stewart's performance, in fact, scores again and again often under difficult conditions—that mannered stutter, those dry observations that he always *almost* fails to get out. A scene that typifies the whole film is a conversation with Thelma Ritter in which he "places" her roundly-delivered commonplaces most beautifully, but in which she goes on pouring them out for long afterwards because they have a crude humour that must apparently also be exploited. Grace Kelly has a fashionable charm that, again, is now offered flat and now, momentarily, (when she slowly puts down the mountaineering book at the end, for instance) used with a touch of wit.

*Dial M for Murder* is excellent; but it remains predominantly a success for the playwright, Frederick Knott. This story of a murderer whose plan misfires but who gives it a new lease of life by some brilliantly fast and then some sustained thinking, is only an exciting piece of algebra, all human reverberations ruthlessly deadened; however it is ingeniously written, Ray Milland is sufficiently suave as the misbegotten genius, and Hitchcock has moved about very sure-footedly on what continues to be for the most part just a stage. The colour is less obtrusive than in *Rear Window*, though in neither case does there seem much reason for using it. Grace Kelly makes a less glamorous appearance; John Williams as the inspector preserves a boyish enthusiasm amongst the macabre goings-on.

## THE YOUNG LOVERS

Reviewed by Penelope Houston

A film about the Cold War which is not a thriller, which puts the human situation before the political, has us from the start on its side. Anthony Asquith's *The Young Lovers* (G.F.D.) is that; and the particular human situation it presents is simple, plausible, and, up to a point, valid. A young man employed in the code room at the American Embassy in London by chance meets a girl whose father is the Minister from a country (carefully unidentified) behind the Iron Curtain. They fall in love; her father applies emotional pressure; his colleagues suspect him of treason. Telephones are tapped, the lovers are trailed to their few clandestine meetings; desperately, at last, they run away, sailing out into a Channel storm in search of a "third place" where they can be at peace. In this denouement, however, logic gives way to an emotional effect: it is not merely that the lovers' predicament seems scarcely to demand so drastic an action, but that in backing them, as it were, into this corner a story which has

found its firm basis in the contemporary situation turns increasingly to the facile plot manoeuvres of melodrama (the train-jumping scene, the episode with the understanding landlady). The issue has been stated, the mood of romantic resignation built up, and then the film slides away from it.

The script, by George Tabori and Robin Estridge, never wholly achieves the level of the subject; dialogue keeps too close to the surface, sentimental points are too easily scored. Given nothing of very much consequence to say, the players have to convey a good deal by implication, and it is largely through Odile Versois' touching, gentle performance that the emotional temperature of the film is kept up. David Knight plays a little too steadily on one level (moonstruck admiration), though David Kossoff does well as the Iron Curtain diplomat.

After so many filmed plays, and after the schoolboyish skirmishes with politics in his recent *The Net*, one is grateful to *The Young Lovers* for returning Anthony Asquith to his proper territory. He sets his opening scene—the meeting at Covent Garden—stylishly; and from the outset it is apparent that his sensibilities are engaged. The refinement may seem somewhat thin-blooded, but the minor key, one feels, is the one that suits Asquith best: the film might have held, profitably, to the soft, elegiac tone of its early, and best, passages.

## FALBALAS and

## RENDEZVOUS DE JUILLET

Reviewed by Lindsay Anderson

Of the myriad sources available to future social historians of our over-selfconscious Europe, the films of Jacques Becker will surely be amongst the most fruitful. Discussing his work in a recent interview (in *Cahiers du Cinéma*), he let drop a suggestive phrase: "*Le côté un peu entomologiste que j'ai peut-être. . .*" These two films of his, neither of them new, both show strongly Becker's fascination with the specialised forms of human behaviour, with the peculiar conventions and apparatus through which individual sections of society express their ways of living. *Falbalas*, made in 1945, is a study of a paranoiac Don Juan, set mostly in a successful Parisian fashion house; *Rendezvous de Juillet* (1949) gives us the world of young French people in Paris shortly after the war, their aspirations and emotional tangles, their irresponsible and disordered lives in an atmosphere of disillusion and insecurity. In each case, one feels it is the setting that has appealed to Becker as much as the individuals who give him his story: in *Falbalas*, the background of professional fashion, the snobby, carpeted salons, and the hectic workrooms behind them; in *Rendezvous de Juillet*, the feverish jazz clubs of the Left Bank, all the private customs of dress and conduct of these turbulent adolescents.

But, as always with Becker—it is this that gives his films their particular virtue—the picturesque social *ambiance* is intimately a part of a whole conception which includes an observation of individual behaviour equally alert, equally canny. In *Falbalas* the progress of the affair between the self-infatuated couturier and the fiancée of his most intimate friend—a warm and generous girl, quite defenceless against the practised manoeuvres of her seducer—is mapped with a finesse and a precision that at times seems even unrelenting. The performance of Raymond Rouleau as the designer is accomplished, though rather too exterior; Micheline Presle plays his victim with a continuous subtlety of feeling that she has not surpassed. Only at the climax, with Rouleau's final incapacity to come to terms with reality and his evasive plunge into madness, does Becker's handling falter and the film decline into clumsy melodrama.

*Rendezvous de Juillet* is a more ambitious subject: the gulf between generations is always vast, and sympathetic though Becker's attitude towards his young people appears to be, he has not succeeded in entering unselfconsciously into their world. He is intrigued by it, charmed by it, but it is not his. It is a pity that the version of his film now available here is a good forty minutes shorter than his original; indeed, the cuts imposed by the British distributors have been so extensive that one has hardly the right to judge the picture by this severe abridgment. However, a five-year-old memory of its premiere at Cannes justifies the impression of *Rendezvous de Juillet* as a colourful fabrication rather than a living work. Superficially it is all true: the externals are brilliantly reproduced, and a



lot of the picture is highly entertaining. But the people—the young bourgeois who dreams of becoming an explorer, the opportunist girl who wants to be an actress, the jazz-fiends and the would-be litterateurs—they remain strangers, resisting the director's attempt to penetrate their hermetic world.

There is something elusive about Becker, something that remains uncommitted despite an approach apparently humane. This is not the place for an extended consideration of his talent: one can only note the problem. Perhaps he himself has suggested the key to it. "*Le côté un peu entomologiste que j'ai peut-être. . .*" He is an entomologist—who likes people—but an entomologist.

## ● CANGACEIRO (The Bandit)

Reviewed by John Gillett

The frontiers of the cinema have extended since the end of the war, and films from countries hitherto unrepresented are seen at the film festivals. The first Brazilian feature film to be shown in this country, *O Cangaceiro* (Gala-Cameo Poly.), is unmistakably Brazilian in inspiration, though the technical credits indicate outside influence. Since Cavalcanti's arrival, many European technicians have been working in Brazil; and *O Cangaceiro* was photographed by Chick Fowle and edited by Oswald Hafenrichter.

The story is simple and direct: a band of wild and ruthless outlaws, led by Galdino Ferreira (Milton Ribeiro), sack a village and carry off the schoolmistress, Olivia. With the help of Galdino's lieutenant, Theodoro (Alberto Ruschel), she escapes across country, but the two are finally tracked down by Galdino's men. Theodoro surrenders and is given a chance to escape by his former leader. He loses the gamble, however, and is killed by the bandits' bullets; Galdino dies immediately afterwards, from wounds received in an earlier gun battle.

The film contains elements usually associated with the American Western, but there is an important difference in tone. The underlying cruelty of the theme (some of the more violent episodes have been cut for this country) is paralleled in other Latin-American productions—*Los Olvidados* and the Argentinian *Las Aguas Bajan Turbias* are two widely differing examples—and this gives *O Cangaceiro* a distinctly raw flavour. Unfortunately, the characterisation is generally less vigorous. The long scenes between Theodoro and Olivia are flat and conventional; an air of contrivance is apparent in the writing; and Galdino's murderous followers—who tend rather too readily to burst into song—are not sharply enough realised. The director, Lima Barreto, seems most interested in such florid passages as the attack on the village and the fight with the militia, which have a sort of crude power and drive, but he shows little sensitivity in dealing with human relationships. Of the players, Ribeiro gives a strong if somewhat rigid performance as Galdino, and Alberto Ruschel seems an interesting actor, though here he is inclined to play too consistently on one note. The actress who plays Olivia is rather stolid.

## IN BRIEF

**SABRINA FAIR** (Paramount). More and more it becomes apparent that Hollywood films in the next few years are going to come in two sizes only—very big and very small. The medium-sized film—the comedy, thriller or Western made within the reasonable resources the subject demands and not representing a big enough investment to preclude a certain individuality—has come to be the most serious casualty of the Hollywood-TV war. The most disturbing aspect of this situation is that small subjects which with modest means and not too expensively starred casts might prove enjoyable are being blown up into super-productions, stretching material beyond the limits it can really accommodate.

*Sabrina Fair* is the latest victim of this elephantiasis. Produced and directed, as the publicity says, "by Billy Wilder, academy award winner who gave you *The Lost Weekend* and *Stalag 17*," *Sabrina Fair*, being a light romantic comedy, largely justifies the fears these curious credentials raise. A simple Cinderella story set in ritzy Long Island society, it has pleasant, at times agreeably witty, dialogue and proves to be an enjoy-

able matinee entertainment. The direction, unfortunately, does not match the material: heavy, Oscar-demanding passages of "production" are superimposed on the little story and, in parts, completely swamp it. Audrey Hepburn receives the sort of star treatment M-G-M used to give to Garbo, and, while the results are never comparably rewarding, she does preserve her extraordinary freshness and vivacity. Humphrey Bogart, whose playing seems in the last year or two to have gained an added cutting edge, is subtly and touchingly funny as the grouchy tycoon. Billy Wilder supplies the most expensive and tasteful variety of gloss and reminds us—not very successfully, in the scenes in Paris—that he once used to work with Lubitsch. His treatment of one comic sequence—in which William Holden sits on a wineglass, forcing splinters into his backside—is however very disagreeable. The subsequent scenes, where the affected region is continually being prodded and kicked by hearty fellow characters, firmly over-step the narrow dividing line between slapstick and viciousness.—Karel Reisz.

**THE BELLES OF ST. TRINIANS** (British Lion). Of course it is a mistake to gild the lily; and in a grotesque, nightmarish way, Ronald Searle's awful school is quite a lily. But when the gilt is thick enough, and extravagant enough, it can be admired for its own sake. Frank Launder's *The Belles of St. Trinians* is possibly the boldest, broadest burlesque feature ever seen. The story is as tall as could be: Miss Fitton puts the entire funds of her debt-bogged school on Arab Boy, a horse belonging to the father of one of her pupils. Her bookie brother, whose money is on another horse, kidnaps Arab Boy, with assistance from his daughter and the rest of the sixth form. The fourth form, however (they are all backing Arab Boy) recapture the horse and hide it in the dorm. Besieged there by the sixth and the bookie's touts, the resourceful fourth lower the horse from the window on knotted blankets; and the siege is raised when Miss Fitton leads St. Trinians' O.G.S into action.

This stirring story hardly matters, however, for the film is a cornucopia of fantastic images and incidents. At some corner of the screen there is always an idiot child with bird's-nest hair, or poor Hermione Baddeley, stupefied and trampled underfoot. Serene at the centre, the languid Miss Fitton (Alastair Sim, in a much more acute female impersonation than one might have expected), murmurs mild nonsense: "Good morning, ladies," she says on entering the mistresses' common room, "this place smells like a ladies' powder room in Port Said"; "Girls, girls, you make me *blench*!"; "Could that, I wonder, be Harry, the bootboy I engaged in 1940?" It is, indeed, Flash Harry, a fine balletic creation by George Cole, reminiscent of Ashton's Dago. Even the frightful girls of St. Trinians are overshadowed by the rest of the staff, which includes Renee Houston, Beryl Reid and Betty Ann Davies, as an existentialist refugee from Holloway. They prove admirable leaders for this mere madcap jape.—David Robinson.



"The Belles of St. Trinians": imprisoned in a school bathroom, policewoman Joyce Grenfell records the enemy's plans on the linoleum.



## CUT COPIES

### William K. Everson

Costume criticised: left, Jane Russell in a dance number which was cut from "The French Line" after objections had been raised by the Breen Office. Costume allowed: right, Jane Russell impersonates Marilyn Monroe in the court scene from "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes."



NOBODY seems to be quite sure as to when the first American film was re-shot or re-edited for British audiences—or *vice versa*. Certainly, however, the practice has been in ever-increasing use since the establishment of the cinema as an international industry, and the reasons for varying versions of the same film can usually be found in one of three categories. First and foremost, of course, is that old bogey censorship—more films have been cut or altered because of it, or to forestall it, than anyone cares to remember. The two lesser categories comprise consideration for differing foreign temperaments and politics.

In these last two categories, films dealing with essentially American themes (particularly American history) have often received quite drastic treatment in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. For example, in 1917 Cecil B. DeMille produced a Mary Pickford picture entitled *The Little American*. It was a naïve, melodramatic affair, with an underlying propagandist element preparing Americans for their country's imminent entry into the war. For the American market, the German hero (Jack Holt) finally rebelled against his barbaric superiors and was sentenced to death. After a last-minute rescue, he and Mary sailed happily for home and the Statue of Liberty. Europe, it was thought, would not react too kindly at that time to a German hero, however sympathetic, and thus a second ending was devised whereby Holt did in fact die, and Miss Pickford was reunited with her true-love. (A French officer, played by Raymond Hatton, he was very much of a minor character throughout.) Actually, English audiences would probably have been far less irritated by the original ending than they must have been by the general tone of the film, which included a scene of a French peasant woman praying to Pickford for help merely because she was an American, and several (unintentionally) amusing shots of Mary valiantly waving an American flag to stave off all disasters—including shipwreck, attempted rape and imminent execution.

A few years later, D. W. Griffith's *America* (1924) was subjected to a peculiar form of "adjustment" to the British market. Not only was the title changed—to *Love and Sacrifice*—but many of the sub-titles were also altered. The film dealt with America's War of Independence, and the idea of showing Britain *losing* a war, so soon after

the victory over Germany, didn't sit too well with the distributors in England. Consequently, frequent titles were inserted to the effect that "British troops, lacking nothing in courage, lacked much in artillery and manpower." Each defeat in battle was prefaced by a title stressing the overwhelming odds against the British. Griffith himself had always been very pro-British, especially since the wonderful reception accorded to *Intolerance*, with its attendant royal screening at Buckingham Palace. Thus, despite the theme, he scrupulously avoided injecting any kind of anti-British bias into *America*. His original titles made frequent reference to the "British code of honour in warfare"; he brought in scenes of Pitt and Burke rising in Parliament to protest against the use of Red Indians as allies; and he centred the villainy in the person of an American renegade and freebooter, the notorious Captain Walter Butler (Lionel Barrymore). *America* remains one of the most interesting and spectacular of all the Griffith epics, and it is unfortunate that it is never revived.

Similar films throughout the years have received like treatment. The extremely interesting *Tennessee Johnson*, for instance, was held up for over a year, then released in Britain as *The Man on America's Conscience* with so much missing (five reels or more) that it had the pacing of a Carey Wilson one-reeler! And just a few months ago, an admittedly mawkish sequence dealing with Washington at Valley Forge was deleted, for Britain, from a magazine-type two-reeler from Warners called *Looking at Life*. Warners, incidentally, frequently make violently patriotic one- and two-reelers which are never released in England at all. Unusually ambitious for shorts, and often packed with spectacular colour library material, they are expertly made subjects, but presumably would not be sympathetically received by a British audience.

Good examples of Hollywood's occasional regard for overseas temperaments are provided by two Garbo vehicles of the mid-twenties. *The Temptress* (1926), in which Garbo appeared as an irresistible and wholly immoral *femme fatale*, had an odd history altogether. The first reel, directed by Stiller, was superb cinema; but Stiller was soon disposed of, and Fred Niblo took over and proceeded to turn the film into a glossy, expert and unbelievable piece of hokum. In the original ending, after a series of wrecked lives spanning two continents, a duel



and the destruction by flood of a vast dam which the engineer-hero had spent many years creating, Garbo had earned the hatred of both husband and lover, and left for Paris. Here she degenerated even further, became a street-walker, and ultimately died in poverty and squalor. The Press reception was tremendous; numerous critical awards were bestowed upon the film. Yet presumably the box-office result was none too satisfactory, and consequently a completely new ending was shot, representing probably the most gigantic switch in movie history. Following Garbo's disappearance, a "Five Years Later" title was inserted, and the scene immediately faded in to the grand opening of the reconstructed dam. The hero (Antonio Moreno) thanked his co-workers and then explained that really all of it was due to the "love of a good woman." On cue, Garbo (who more than anyone else had been responsible for the *destruction* of the dam), walked into his arms for a clinch fade-out. On release in the U.S. this version proved a huge success, though the critics were outraged and promptly withdrew all the honours and awards. Europe retained the original version.

A like occurrence marked *Love* (1927), Garbo's first version of *Anna Karenina*. While Europe was privileged to receive the original version (it finished with a shot of John Gilbert offering his fellow officers "... a toast to love!" believing that Garbo was waiting at his home, and unaware that she had already killed herself), American audiences were given a less gloomy denouement. That over-worked "Five Years Later" title found Gilbert in a military academy where he unexpectedly encountered Garbo's young son. A few frames later Garbo herself made a joyful entrance, explaining that she had been "very lonely since my husband died." Clinch, fade-out and "End" title.

Occasionally a European producer, anticipating the American need for at least a "tidy" ending, if not a happy one, will carefully shoot additional sequences for the U.S. version. A case in point is Jean Renoir's *La Bête Humaine*. The book and the European version of the film both ended with the suicide of Gabin, and the tremen-

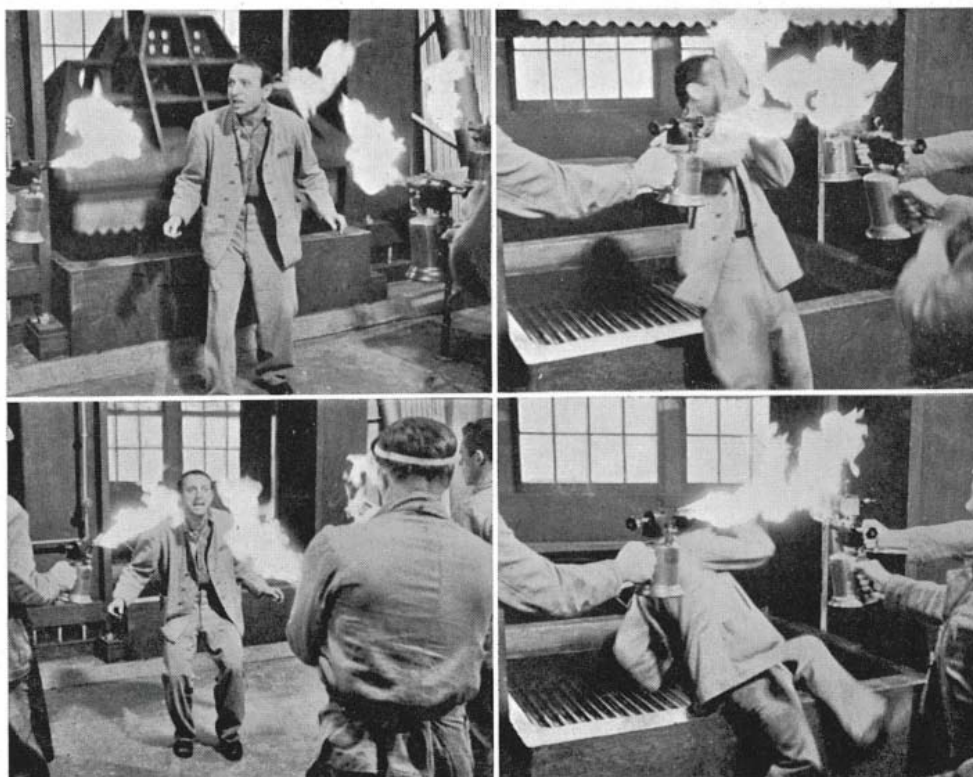
dously dramatic shots of the driverless train racing down the tracks. In the American version, a stoker stops the train, porters and others alight to recover the body of Gabin, and the train proceeds on its way in an orderly fashion.

## II

British and American censors differ on two significant points. The British strongly disapprove of undue violence and brutality—something which concerns the U.S. equivalent very little. On the other hand, Britain—and especially since the introduction of the "X" certificate—has never been unduly concerned by sex, provided that the treatment is adult and in good taste. (Near-pornography is something else again; in Britain it is promptly and properly excised; in non-censorship States in America it is quite amazing what is passed). In America, where there are so many different censorship bodies with so many different standards, generalisation is difficult. Hence we will deal with the two most important contributing factors to American censorship of imported films. One is the acquisition of the all-important Production Code Seal, without which no worthwhile British film would dare invade the precarious American market. The second is the New York censor board—since the majority of foreign film distributors are located in New York, the version of the film released here will, as a rule, be that available to the rest of the country.

It is the New York censor board that does the most damage. *L'Eternel Retour*, for example (untouched in England), was here so heavily cut that the plot was totally distorted. Massive deletions in the love scenes turned the Marais-Sologne relationship into little more than pleasant friendship, while a further huge cut at the end served to indicate that Sologne would actually return, quite happily, to her husband. New York distributors are of little help when their pictures are cut: anxious to retain every frame possible in an "exploitable" sequence, they often make no attempt to cover up cuts by further deletions, or laboratory dissolves. As a result, the bordello sequence in *Manon* was just a series of disjointed scenes, the dia-

"The British disapprove of undue violence and brutality..." Part of this particular episode of violence—in which a stool pigeon is set upon by his fellow prisoners—was cut from the prison picture "Brute Force" when it was shown in this country.



logue a mass of all but unintelligible gibberish. Yet the final reel of *Manon*, a peculiar combination of Stroheim and Cocteau, was quite untouched in America; in Britain, of course, the whole reel was originally cut. *Extase* exists in so many versions both in America and Europe that it is difficult to keep track of them. One enterprising version for non-censorship States in the U.S. even contains *two* nudes! Oddly enough, the New York censors occasionally take sizeable chunks out of the home product too—*Letter From an Unknown Woman* was a film so afflicted.

With the exception of such unfortunate cases as *Oliver Twist*, American censorship of British films usually involves little more than a minor deletion of a scene here and there, or an occasional substitution. (True, the "minor" deletions are occasionally of key scenes, but this is not too frequent. Despite frequently outrageous initial demands by American censors, reasonable compromises are usually reached.) The close-ups of the can-can girls were removed from *So Long at the Fair*; Madeleine Carroll's stocking-changing scene in *The 39 Steps* was shortened; Rex Harrison's frequent use of the word "hell" in *Blithe Spirit* was removed from the soundtrack, and so on. To forestall censorship—or to combat "uncommercial" elements—some British film-makers deliberately shoot quite different versions for the American market. The suicide ending of *Bedelia*, for instance, was dropped here and replaced by a sequence in which Miss Lockwood was arrested. Sometimes the whole structure of a film is changed, as in *The Brothers*, where the original tragic ending was completely abandoned, and America was privileged to see Patricia Roc happily finding a husband instead of a watery grave. Another film which underwent surprising changes for the American market was *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. Dennis Price's line concerning his regret at having had to kill Guinness' amour, though he "found some consolation in the thought that she had undoubtedly already suffered a fate *worse* than death" was replaced for U.S. tastes with a remark that at least he had "saved her from growing old." One of the love scenes with Joan Greenwood likewise had fresh dialogue, and, to ensure that no one interpreted the ending as a victory and escape for Price, a new ending (in which the gaoler was seen discovering his memoirs and presenting them to the warden) was tacked on to the film.

British cutting of American films primarily involves brutality, and a recital of examples would serve little point. It is, however, perhaps worth recording some isolated examples of cuts—or alterations—in the past, as a cross-section of the sort of material that is frequently deleted for the British market. In Leni's *Waxworks*, the Jack the Ripper sequence was shortened, and Krauss was actually referred to as Springheeled Jack—a much less notorious British criminal. Possibly because he was never caught, there seems to be an unwritten (and little publicised) law that the Ripper should never be referred to in any film under that name. More recently, quite savage Indian torture scenes were missing from both *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* and *Broken Arrow* as released in Britain: presumably they were taken out to ensure a "U" certificate. A similar situation can be found in M-G-M's *Key to the City*, wherein Clark Gable and Raymond Burr fought with a vicious meat-hook. British audiences saw only the beginning and end of that fight! From *Gone With the Wind* British censors removed a scene in which Gable taunts Vivien Leigh, bearing his child, and tells her with a leer, "Cheer up, Scarlett, there's always time for you to have an accident"—or words to that effect. Deleted from *Sunset Boulevard* was a line of dialogue in which Stroheim explains that he was Swanson's

first husband, and also several slightly sensuous shots of Swanson drying William Holden's back after a swimming episode.

Cuts are frequently made in horror films. Missing from English prints of *Return of the Vampire* were detailed close-ups of the vampire's destruction when dragged out into the sunlight. (Columbia had built a wax dummy replica of Bela Lugosi over a skeleton. The subsequent close-ups of melting wax and protruding bones were considered too strong for British tastes, even though in America the film is an old reliable at children's matinees.) And back in 1935, in *Bride of Frankenstein*, amid a welter of gore and destruction, the censors saw fit to remove a rather touching little sequence in which Karloff, as the monster, lumbering around in a deserted crypt came across the corpse of the beautiful young girl who would become his "bride." Removal of this interesting little scene, in which he hums happily as he strokes the girl's hair, lessened a good deal of the power of that later sequence in which she reappeared as the monstrous creature impersonated by Elsa Lanchester. One of the relatively few films seriously affected by the deletion of horrific content was *The Lost Weekend*: though the cuts were smoothly executed, the loss of two sequences did rob the film of considerable dramatic punch.

### III

British product, on the whole, suffers more at the hands of the American distributors than at those of the U.S. censors. As a recent example: when Thorold Dickinson's *Secret People* was released here, it was shortened considerably and sold as an action picture. To tighten it up, most of the early Audrey Hepburn footage was removed. But along came *Roman Holiday* to boost Miss Hepburn as a box-office name, and so back went all her deleted scenes. In order to keep the same running time, however, another cut had to be made, and consequently the entire ending of the film was hacked off with an instrument that must have resembled a butcher's axe. The picture now concludes—almost in the middle of a sentence—as Valentina Cortesa is leaving the hospital in a taxi.

There is also the occasional need to shorten a film allegedly far too long for the market in which it now finds itself. For instance, the fourteen-reel *Colonel Blimp* came down to seven reels; *The Courtneys of Curzon Street* and *School for Secrets* came out on a double bill at six reels apiece; on general release, a whole third was lopped off *Tales of Hoffmann*; *Dead of Night* was put out with two complete stories missing (despite the confusion this created in the climactic nightmare sequence); and—a crowning indignity—after the deletion of three reels *Lady Godiva Rides Again* was renamed *Striptease Girls* and sent around to the low-grade "exploitation" houses. These troubles occasionally descend also upon American releases. After lying on the shelf for over a year and a half in New York, John Ford's *The Sun Shines Bright* was clipped down to sixty-five minutes and sent out as a second feature to the uncut British *Trent's Last Case*.

The practice of cutting has produced some confusing results in its time. For the creation of unnecessary chaos, though, no one has perhaps quite equalled the herculean efforts of one company in editing a fifteen episode serial, *The Secret of Treasure Island*, down to a twelve-episode serial (re-titled *Hidden Treasure*). This task was performed without the loss of a single frame of footage or the re-recording of any spoken forewords, with the result that episode six would open with the narrator explaining that, "last week in episode seven we saw . . .", and describing events that had not yet taken place!



# SONG and DANCE



Gold Diggers of 1933

At its best, the American cinema has always shown unique skill in combining wide popular appeal with genuine artistic quality. It has done this mainly by developing certain traditions, which in themselves capture public imagination, and are also flexible and rich enough to allow for personal variation and experiment. The western, the gangster film, the musical : so many of the best American films come under one or other of these headings.

Since the National Film Theatre opened in 1952, its list of projects has included series of programmes to illustrate these three major traditions of American film-making. The scope of the undertaking, the difficulty of collecting enough material, has involved a long period of planning; but now one of these projects has become a reality, and this month sees the beginning of a homage to the musical film.

To set the American achievements in perspective, examples of British and European musicals will also be included ; but the emphasis will be on the country which has remained most constantly prolific and resourceful in the genre. Of course, the danger of a tradition is that it can degenerate into a formula, but the history of the musical—like that of so many traditions—is one of cycles. Decline and renewal constantly recur. The "42nd Street" of yesterday becomes the "Two Tickets to Broadway" of to-day, but a fresh and sophisticated eye also revives those massed, absurdly dressed chorines of twenty years ago in the nostalgic satire of "Singin' in the Rain."

Not the least fascination of the musical, in fact, is its vivid reflection of popular fashions, popular moods. It has shifted from the strenuous optimism of those songs from musicals of the New Deal period ("With Plenty of Money and You," "Keep Young and Beautiful"), to the quiet folksy reminiscences of "Meet Me in St. Louis" and "Summer Holiday"; and when the ghost of Florenz Ziegfeld looked down, in "Ziegfeld Follies," from a twinkling paradise to watch Lucille Ball in "shocking" pink perform a cat-ballet to "Bring on Those Wonderful Girls," he really witnessed a complete revolution in taste from his own celebrated spectacles.



King of Jazz

42nd Street



In the first musicals—and as soon as movies began to talk, they sang—Those Wonderful Girls did almost everything. They danced on mammoth grand pianos, on slopes of revolving polished glass with artificial lakes, up and down gleaming staircases, and even played violins. In general they were manoeuvred, as an American critic remarked, “in forms as abstract as ever were found in the most abstract films of the ‘avant-garde’.” “King of Jazz,” “Broadway Melody,” “Gold Diggers on Broadway,” “Paramount on Parade,” “Footlight Parade,” were the first great spectacle successes. And the backstage musical, which was to provide a standard “putting on a show” plot for years, was given a notable send-off with “42nd Street.” At the same time, as a result of some European experiments—notably by Clair, in France, and Thiele, in Germany—a more intimate and sophisticated note was struck by Lubitsch (“The Love Parade,” “One Hour with You”), Mamoulian (“Love Me To-Night”) and Milestone (“Hallelujah, I’m a Bum”). These films eschewed spectacle and, by exploring relationships between sound and image, attempted to create a new “form” for the musical film—Lubitsch with dialogue spoken and sung in rhyming couplets, Mamoulian with a kind of impressionism in which action and cutting were, effectively, set to music.



By the middle 30's, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers had firmly arrived, and for the first time dance numbers showed a real choreographic invention. The wonderful pair danced not up and down staircases or on huge glittering constructions, but in life-size natural settings—a park bandstand, a hotel foyer, in a bedroom while dressing for dinner. Astaire brought a new grace and subtlety to the dance film, and the tunes—"Isn't This a Lovely Day?" "One for My Baby," "The Continental," "Never Gonna Dance"—are still evocative.

Meanwhile, the great spectacles rolled extravagantly on. Balanchine was brought to Hollywood for "Goldwyn Follies" and "On Your Toes," and Busby Berkeley drilled the Wonderful Girls through marble halls, placed Eleanor Powell on an outsize drum that needed 20 men to hold it up (see "Rosalie," below), paid tribute to a master showman in "The Great Ziegfeld." By the late 30's, though, vitality was beginning to ebb; and M-G-M's simple little "Babes in Arms," with Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney, in fact presaged a new development.



Swing Time

Rosalie





The British musical, though superficially influenced by Hollywood, followed a line of its own. The films were not slick, and the occasional "production numbers" communicated a sense of strain; their true appeal lay in their disarming innocence. They were homely and good-natured and clung firmly to comfortable native values. Even the lyrics had a coltishness—Anna Neagle sang "Swing a little Jingle of the Jungle," and the incomparable Jessie Matthews (left), "Tinkle! Tinkle! Tinkle! What if the raindrops sprinkle?"

It's Love Again

Aunt Sally

The technique stemmed from our own inimitable stage traditions — which still so blithely survive to-day in "Wedding in Paris"—and it was splendidly insular. As the ruthless common-sense and sense of Fun of Cicely Courtneidge (right) defeated glamorous foreign spies, so the lithe, unpretentious charm of Jessie Matthews won the hero's heart from expensively-gowned, predatory American ladies.





The history of the American musical since 1939 belongs almost exclusively to M-G-M. Arthur Freed's first production there was "Babes in Arms"; in later years he introduced many new talents to the screen. From New York came Vincente Minnelli ("Cabin in the Sky," "Ziegfeld Follies," "Meet Me in St. Louis," "The Pirate," "An American in Paris," "The Band Wagon"), and the dance director Charles Walters, who later made "Easter Parade" with Fred Astaire and Judy Garland (right) and "Good News."



Easter Parade

Ziegfeld Follies



Designers like Jack Martin Smith, Lemuel Ayers and Oliver Smith helped to give these new musicals a fresh and sometimes daring visual finish. Scriptwriters Adolph Green and Betty Comden, other dance directors—Robert Alton, Michael Kidd—were further welcome recruits. And this period also saw the renaissance of Astaire who, marking time after the partnership with Ginger Rogers ended, entered upon a new creative period.





Singin' in the Rain

The other important newcomer, of course, was Gene Kelly, who developed as dancer, choreographer and director with "On The Town" and "Singin' in the Rain." As Minnelli's style showed a European wit and decorative flair, so Kelly evolved something essentially American, robust, contemporary, but with its roots in a folk tradition. Kelly makes a dance out of simple human situations, against everyday settings. Likewise his former collaborator, Stanley Donen, whose new film "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers," transposes the story of the rape of the Sabine women to the hill-billy America of a hundred years ago.

Seven Brides for Seven Brothers





# A REVIEW OF REVIEWS

John Grierson

COMMENTS on my first column have reminded me that criticism has as many facets as Mr. Baldwin's truth and the elephant of the Seven Blind Men of Benares. I blew in as a producer with a blast for a state of criticism which seemed to have given up the, to me, essential process of discovery; but others with other interests equally essential to them insist on a widening of my own range of criticism. Not a few are doubtful altogether of a discussion of criticism on first principles. They are sceptical of standards which are *sub specie* of this, that or the other thing, and of any higher law to be imposed. I sense a certain fatigue all round with discussion of art which is purposive or purposively non-purposive, or might be suspected of knowing where the difference lies. I am confronted with what appears to be a direct view of entertainment, not as art but as something apparently different in kind and somehow free from the normal laws which one applies to the painters and the poets.

An interesting word from R. P. Chatterton of Magdalen says he simply wants a rough idea of what to see, and he is happy to accept the tittle-tattle ("Move over, Dietrich!") and the blurb ("a style . . . calm yet passion-loving") because the critics can't ever hide what a picture is really like. The public's attitudes are formed on many fronts and film criticisms themselves "are surely only representative snippets of the mental climate." He adds, "I don't imagine critics having much effect on the way things are changing, or on the people doing the most exciting and successful work." Chatterton apologises for "not arguing a point."

To me it is a very important point, for he is not alone in putting this new *laissez-faire* viewpoint in regard to criticism. It is one which affects most of us as we stand, or seem to stand, in the presence of so many *forces majeures*. Now, on every hand, is this thought of outside forces hardly to be packed into the narrow act of judgment, far less dictat. It isn't new. But the influence of mass movements and disciplines, world concepts and world fronts—not to mention the atomic sword held secretively over all our heads—does make the doctrine of personal critical responsibility, leadership and control, more seemingly helpless and old-fashioned than ever before.

Criticism reflects it, and so do the arts themselves. We have broken cisterns and not only in poetry. But whereas the poet has gone into his shell and become esoteric, we in the mass arts have found a totally different rationalisation of our situation. We have the public, the blessed public, to stand total measure for us. We have the mystique of the box-office. Lacking the old-fashioned nerve and effrontery that went with the assurance that judgment could be absolute and influence sure, we have created for ourselves the image of a living and driving force—man on the move—establishing, however how, the only reality to be served.

One heard it a long time ago in Taine and it was a valuable first democratic corrective to the aristocratic

illusion that art was not a living and constant process, relative to all other living processes about it. It came again with a bang in the highly interesting æsthetic of Leon Trotsky, written in the heat of the Revolution itself. "The trouble with poor Mayakovsky is that he tries to shout louder than the revolution. . . . The louse on the poorest packman has more of life and reality than much that presently passes for art." And then the ultimate injunction to all "to stay always where the people are." There was much to salute in all that and much to follow, except Trotsky also allowed that there were ultimates in judgment to be asserted whatever the situation to be served. I have never known whether this was counted a deviation in Trotsky, but I note that Marxist theory progressively returns to it, and, in the æsthetic field, with great force at the present time. It is our other world, which discovered the concept first and nurtured it most, which now appears to capitulate to the mystique of the people *tout simple*, and the luxuriation in disorder which one sees in, say, American radio, American movies and not to mention American politics.

We have our own version of the mystique in British movies, and more of it in radio than is commonly allowed. We have our producers, distributors and exhibitors who operate simply and solely on giving the public what it wants, or appears to want, and are variously successful in doing so. They are the people who, if they are producers, say of coming writers that they "wait till they come" and stand on the side-lines waiting to grab up the "established." They initiate nothing. Some distributors and exhibitors have carried the policy even further. By simple control over the basic moneys from which production comes, and simple control over access to the public, they have been in a position to prevent initiative and they have done so. Chatterton's acceptance of the fact that there are people "doing the most exciting and successful work" is too simple. There are obviously some who are doing neither exciting nor successful work because of the way movie economics lie, so controlled is the market and so cynical sometimes the operation. The surprising thing, too, is that the cynicism and the certainty lack a scientific basis of market research.

That is the bad side and, yes, it has its own critical cohort, some weary of well-doing, some sceptical of well-doing itself, swearing that after all "is" is "is." The latest blurb for the "is" comes surprisingly from Noël Coward. It took James Bridie to teach him to me, but I have not forgotten and will hold him for a talent as notable as Maugham's, and wiser in that he has so far spared us his views on Dostoevski. But up pops our author of *Red Peppers* in the *Sunday Express*, defending the judgment of people in the mass like any hard-bitten circuit booker. "Primarily a place of entertainment . . . do their best to provide the public with what they think it wants, and they *know* that the public wants the star, always has wanted and always will want a star attraction, a famous name, a familiar and loved personality. . . . This may be bitter and unpalatable to those, etc." No

question of where the stars came from, how made familiar, how given the opportunity to be loved: only the good old mystique of the all-creative public, and of the manager or booker, that sensitive creature with his stethoscope to the great and ultimate heart throb. There come qualifications, of course, but too late and too little to affect Coward's principal thesis. "The public has a curious capacity for proving to be right in the long run." About what and within what limitations, I find myself asking, but find no answer. "Do our best . . . trust the public." And above all believe that the manager, or the booker, or whoever he is, is doing *his* best. I am all for it, except that I would like to be assured sometimes of a responsible and imaginative best. I add only that I am surprised to have all this from Coward. It isn't like him. I seem to remember that he once got the critics together on a notable occasion and said pretty bluntly, "I am right and you are wrong and you are not going to stop me." He wasn't hiding behind the public then.

Happily, in Britain there has always been a tendency to deviate from the box-office dictat and even in the mass arts. The B.B.C. is the symbol of it, but the deviation has been present in the most unlikely quarters from the Treasury through the bankers down. The British Film Institute and SIGHT AND SOUND are publicly maintained to do no other than correct the possibility of public illusion. To take the legislator critic first—and he becomes more and more important as the Government has stepped into film finance—it has been interesting to note over the years the various attempts to legislate for quality, no matter the *a priori* difficulty of doing so. The Parliamentary debates on the cinema have reflected a concern for the public or national interest as distinct from the return on moneys lent. The N.F.F.C. has not been considered as simply a film bank but as an aid and sustainer of creative effort as such. *The Conquest of Everest* in the last public debate loomed so much bigger than its simple economic justification that it seemed for a moment that we were back in a day when work could be considered for itself alone.

Even on the lesser level of national purpose, one has known governments say to all intents and purposes, "The money problem is our problem: get on with the business of bringing this, or that alive." It may have been the Commonwealth or the new age of technology and science, or the working people and their social problems: it was always in effect a charge to turn the imagination of the people to this horizon or that.

There may be a present lull in this leadership of the imagination on the national level, but it is well to remember that it has so notable a record in the past twenty-five years—and not least in the domain of the cinema—that it has established a habit of thought in British movies from which no producer or director of any consideration is quite free. The most notable are deeply conscious of it, and if only because of it have good reason to ask criticism for its collaboration in this matter of leadership. There is another point. The best of the producers are conscious of the fact that the sense of purpose, however intangible it may seem, has in particular periods lit up their whole work. Only recently I heard Sir Michael Balcon ask whence came the special sense of creative confidence and spirit which seemed to affect everyone, particularly in the 'thirties and again in the war. My own notion is that a direct sense of duty in the matter of imaginative leadership on the national level was in these particular periods an accepted social fact. I would add, on another level of argument, that it may

be a *sine qua non* in the modern corporate society and neither the individual nor the group can quite make up for the lack of it.

In any case, people like Korda and Balcon and a dozen other producers and directors are on the record as not having made the box-office the single or even the major end of their operation. The key to a producer's quality, and certainly to his reputation, still lies ironically not in his standout commercial successes, but in his relative failures. I mean the ones that have reflected his capacity to take a chance on discovery and revelation, and take a bashing for it if necessary. It is still blessedly something to have gone down with distinction. Our better makers have done so, and I always think it of major significance that the negatives of a man like Korda, as of Chaplin, remain a great property long years after they are made. Certainly, both Korda and Balcon are honoured for something other than the fact that they are good showmen. It was likewise notable that none of us failed to regret the death of Gabby Pascal or appreciate that Shaw was—somewhat madly—right.

Balcon is the only producer I have been directly associated with, though I have known the others moderately well. I will only say of Balcon that I never heard him in my life seek or advise a level of production that was not, in his view, "worth while." My issues with him—and I am happy to say they have been many—were only ever on the question of what, indeed, was this business of being "worth while." He has, if anything, more respect for "les beaux sentiments" than I have. I tend to go with Gide. "C'est avec les beaux sentiments qu'on fait de la mauvaise littérature." This only makes the point more strongly that a producer like Balcon, conscious as he may be of the public and the box-office, would despise the thought of giving it anything mean, however sure the return might be.

The upshot of this, I think, is that here in Britain there is a perpetual opposition to the concept of the public as the only law-giver in the field. Why, then, do we not hear more of it? Why doesn't it speak out louder instead of being merely interpreted, as I am doing now? There you have movie-making at the nub. Did you note Sandy Mackendrick the other day—in the *Sunday Chronicle*—bowing deeply to the box-office? He was a practical fellow, he said. Now Mackendrick doesn't give an essential damn for money-making, any more than I do. But it has always been a pretty gambit to swear by the box-office and then go one's own way. It has even been an insurance for going one's own way that one should build up the illusion of being a practical fellow, a compromising sort of chap, etc. The truth about Mackendrick is that he has more of loving kindness in him and in his work than almost any other director, and that is why the public likes him. That is the single measure of his practicality. There is nothing deliberate about him. The cold-blooded and strictly commercial pursuit of success is another matter altogether.

The most interesting thing today in the development of the cinema is that the cold-blooded commercial forces are tightening up the strait-jacket on a scale we have never known before. By that token, there was never a time when the opposition had greater need to realise the nature of the changes taking place in the film world, or greater need to understand where the forces of imaginative leadership can most realistically be applied.

There are solid reasons for the present increase in the



power of the commercial forces. One way of saying it—though not the most fundamental way—is to say that the lush days of producers like Korda and Pascal are over. Costs are up; markets diminish or define themselves in sharper and more limiting forms. With these factors go shorter schedules and safety-first complexes that affect everyone. But that is only one side of it. The other aspect of the change is best to be reflected in the fact that today one whole range of picture-making is simply dead on the market. At one end of the scale the documentary film—even the dramatic story documentary—has no obvious market to appeal to. At the other end of the scale, no film which is not in itself notably spectacular or notably unusual can be assured of a return on the British market of more than, say, forty or fifty thousand pounds at the utmost.

It means that production today becomes more and more sharply confined to two categories. The first is the category of very cheaply made pictures which, on the basis of their production, can have no pretensions to distinction. The second is the category of the spectacular, very expensive production, the first concern of which is to command headlines and news value. Its cinematic quality is only incidental. It is, for the moment, one cold fact of the situation that almost any picture at all in CinemaScope will be accounted a big picture. It is another cold fact that the second-run theatres, which have been the mainstay of much of our most distinguished and distinctive British film-making, have gone over by the hundred to CinemaScope and are having a vast success in doing so. Even Mackendrick's loving kindness business is due for a shock, practical fellow that he is. Indeed, one fears not a little for Mackendrick, Phil Leacock and all such.

I know it is possible to indicate exceptions. There are occasional pictures which break through and seem to make a folly of these market generalisations. *Genevieve* was a poor relation at Pinewood, and none of the *ad hoc* geniuses of the market expected anything from it. *Trouble in Store* was another surprise. *Reluctant Heroes* came through beyond any expectation. *The Brave Don't Cry* was, apart from *Everest*, much the most successful commercial film Group 3 has made, and actually holds a few house records. *Never Take No for an Answer* was a most significant title. The bookers and exhibitors are aware of all this, but so large are the moneys now involved in showmanship, and so concentrated is the structure of buying and selling, that they seemingly dare not take a chance on any exception either proving or indicating a rule. My own view at the moment is that, taking account of these hard facts of the situation, the forces of imaginative leadership should be the more determined to ensure while there is yet time some security for the field of experiment outside the range of what we know to be the certain fields of commercial success.

In this the critics have a major part to play. All along the line they have—and I am sure honestly enough—been aiding the process by which the major, spectacular categories are exclusively celebrated in their notices. They have consistently, by implication, condemned pictures outright by simply saying that they were "small" pictures. Lejeune is particularly guilty, though she was once one of the most creative celebrators of quality in "small" pictures. It is, of course, from them, and from them

exclusively, that the Mackendricks, Leacocks, Gilberts, Frankels and Paltenghis have come, and not to mention artists by the score. Have they really all fallen for Wardour Street? When it comes to a showdown, what is big? Distinction is everything, as any smalltown boy or girl must know. It has been the modest film trying to be distinguished which has given new people a chance in terms in which there was a chance of their being distinguished.

I am not denouncing the public as a guide: I am only putting the point that at the present time the public is a damned bad guide from a creative point of view. For one reason or another it is going exclusively for the big stuff, and much that is truly creative and of value to the living art of the cinema is going to the wall. For no reason at all I am reminded of the reply of Balfour of Burleigh when someone said, "God's will be done." "To be sure, to be sure," said he, "but we maun help Him." I am not for a split second diminishing the part which the public as critic plays. It is true—though Coward takes it too far—that the public is often right, righter than the makers, righter than the critics, righter in the sense of being sometimes instinctively more sensitive to reality, and even to the future. It is likely to be the first, for example, to discover that Swanson is out and a girl called Clara Bow in, and other such tidings of great joy. It was again the public which discovered the difference between epic and mere Western, with Paramount racking their brains for a couple of years afterwards to know what it was all about. It is the public too—and always—which sorts out the quality of the clowns and the comics. There is, in fact, a range of values—wherever the profound is associated with the simple—wherever new social forces, of which the intelligentsia is apt to be insensitive, are taking shape—in which the public in the mass is liable to be a truer, sharper and more progressive critic than any of us. It is wherever the common experience tells.

But these important and even fundamental contributions of the public as critic, themselves represent limitations. Much experience is given in the sense that it comes with the facts of life, but much more has to be worked on and worked for, and laboriously, before it is found. In this matter, there would appear to be a special relationship between the public and the people, sometimes called explorers, sometimes artists, sometimes critics, who seek the new horizons of experience or larger, perhaps more subtle, horizons of experience than may be expected of the common facts of life. One suspects that this relationship is absolute and that it would be against the natural law if the hungry sheep looked up and were not fed. One suspects, too, that the relationship should be deliberately maintained, not less but more, in a period so sensitive to *forces majeures*, and in a period in which we all tend to be overwhelmed by the complexity of world concepts and world fronts. I find it a curious point that the British public, in so far as its reactions to film are a guide, is less interested today in the far horizons and the common problems of humanity associated with them, than it was twenty years ago. If this is true and represents a loss of spirit in our time, its implications so far as the creative leadership goes are surely worth examining.

P.S.—My apologies to my correspondents, especially the ones who wrote about *Them*!. I shall try to get round to them next time.



## ITALIAN PRODUCTIONS

Later this month another Italian Film Festival will be held in London. The programme will probably include "La Strada," written and directed by Federico Fellini and starring Giulietta Masina and Anthony Quinn (above) as a wandering gipsy couple, and "Pane, Amore e Fantasia," with Gina Lollobrigida (right) and Vittorio de Sica. A great box-office success in Italy, "Pane, Amore e Fantasia" is a light-weight comedy written by Ettore Margadonna, who collaborated with Castellani on the script of "Due Soldi di Speranza."



Left: Alida Valli and Heinz Moog in a scene from Luchino Visconti's "Senso," a love story set against the background of the Austro-Italian conflict of the 1860's. Others in the cast are Farley Granger and Massimo Girotti.



## Book Reviews

### FRENCH CRITICAL WRITING

One of the most delightful features about a visit to France—apart from food, sunshine, etc.—is that civilised attitude towards living that finds its most obvious expression in the way people talk about the arts. At a theatrical festival at Angers this summer, I asked a young Frenchman, not in the least an intellectual, if he was going to see the *Hamlet* which featured among the revivals more familiar to a French audience. He seemed surprised. “*Evidemment, on va voir Hamlet. . .*”

“*Evidemment. . .*” The little word evokes a world picture wholly different, and considerably more sympathetic than its British equivalent, in which the arts tend to be tolerated, or patronised, where not positively mistrusted. Amongst professionals the gap is just as wide. Compared with the French we have the air of a nation of amateurs, in film criticism no less than in any other cultural activity. Readers of *SIGHT AND SOUND* will probably remember that illuminating Quiz on professional attitudes to which half a dozen or so of our leading film critics contributed some issues back. “I consider it undesirable for a critic, whose job is to appraise the finished product, to become immersed in the technical mumbo-jumbo of the studio. It is his job to eat the pudding, not to meddle in the kitchen.” “I have always believed that critics can serve their function most usefully by standing as far as possible aside from the commercial and technical trees to look at the wood on the screen.” An unfortunate metaphor, this last one, but certainly revealing: imagine a music critic who scorned acquaintanceship with the “trees” of harmony and orchestration on the grounds that such knowledge would obscure his appreciation of a symphonic “wood.”

This proud affirmation of the value of ignorance is at least one vice from which French critics are wholly immune. They are lucky, of course; secure in their cultural tradition, they are under no pressure to write down to their public, to dress up their criticism in the specious gladrags of journalism, careful to avoid any suggestion of the esoteric or the specialised.

All this is not quite to suggest that it would be worth while subscribing in Britain to the *Figaro Littéraire* for the sake of M. Claude Mauriac's weekly contribution; or, indeed, to any of the French weeklies or dailies. French readers in search of informed writing on the cinema are more fortunate than British, but such criticism is rarely important enough to deserve export, however relatively superior. But there are a number of specialised publications which are well worth attention: for instance, the admirable collection of monographs published under the title “7e Art” by the Editions du Cerf, under the direction of Jean Quéval and Jean-Louis Tallenay.

Admirably produced, and very well illustrated, these little books show a standard of specialised knowledge and gusto quite beyond anything one can imagine being done in this country. Jean Quéval's book on Marcel Carné was noticed in *SIGHT AND SOUND* on its publication three years ago. Since then, the collection has expanded in five parallel series: on individual films (Georges Charensol on *Belles de Nuit*); on individual directors (Quéval's Carné is to be followed by a *Jean Renoir* from André Bazin); on problems (*Le Cinéma a-t-il une âme?* by Henri Agel, and *Le Cinéma et le Sacré* by Agel and Amedée Ayfre). A technical series is to be opened by a book on the art of the cameraman; and a general group includes a study of the Western; *Seven Years of French Cinema* (1945-53); a review of world production in 1953; and a survey of the French cinema from its beginnings to 1945.

Some of these books are better than others; none is without value. Perhaps the least successful is the review of 1953, the work of six critics (including our own Gavin Lambert, whose appreciations of Cinerama and *Limelight* are reprinted from *SIGHT AND SOUND*); a formidable spread of territory is covered—American, British, French, Italian, Russian, Spanish production, special chapters on animated cinema, on short production, on Trnka and Grimault—but there is lacking the harmony between contributors which is needed to give such a survey, particularly one presented from an assessor's rather than a cataloguist's viewpoint, the consistency it needs. Not

surprisingly, the books on the French cinema are distinctly more successful; but so is J. L. Rieupeyrou's monograph on the Western. Written from an historical rather than an æsthetic viewpoint, this covers the development of the genre as well as the relation of Hollywood's picture of the West to the actual history of the Frontier. Here surely is the basis for a wonderful series of programmes at the National Film Theatre. I recommend the book very strongly, and indeed the whole collection. The address of Les Editions du Cerf is 29 Boulevard Latour-Maubourg, Paris 7.

I have not left myself much space for two periodicals which deserve recommendation: *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Positif*. The latter, and junior of these, has developed prodigiously from a young provincial review, published in Lyons, to a lively, uncompromising specialist bi-monthly. Special numbers have recently appeared devoted to Vigo (a fine piece of editing) and the Mexican cinema. *Aspects of the American Cinema* and *French Cinema Since the War* are shortly promised, and should be well worth acquiring. *Cahiers du Cinéma* (the inheritor of the proud tradition of Jean-Georges Auriol's *Revue du Cinéma*) is equally uncompromising, and rather more luxuriously produced. Two of France's best critics, the sympathetic Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and the exhaustive André Bazin, are its editors, and contribute regularly to its pages. (One regrets that the name of Jean Quéval no longer appears in *Cahiers*; their team is not so strong that they can afford to drop this perceptive and unhysterical critic.) Amongst valuable features which have lately appeared in the magazine, perhaps the most remarkable are a series of tape-recorded interviews with Renoir (see the last issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*), Becker and Bunuel. These are excellently done, authentically and amiably self-revealing; without over-statement, they can be described as important.

I have stressed in this note the enlivening qualities of French writing on the cinema; I have not emphasised its more irritating aspects. These certainly exist. Though the French are commonly assumed to think more lucidly, more logically than us, there is little evidence in their film criticism to support the theory. Much of the reviewing in both *Cahiers* and *Positif* tends unhappily towards the dithyrambic; the younger critics especially seem short on analytical capacity, anxious to establish themselves as *littérateurs*. In *Cahiers* in particular this seems to have led to a perverse cultivation of the meretricious. One quotation must suffice: “*La gentillesse est le signe des grands cinéastes; de cette vérité première, Otto Preminger offre d'entrée la vivante confirmation.*” The adulation of directors like Howard Hawks, Preminger, Hitchcock, even Robert Wise seriously vitiates much of the writing in *Cahiers*; an examination of the attitude behind it would be worth attempting. But let me end on the note of commendation: both these magazines offer informed and stimulating writing on the cinema. They will often annoy: they are seldom dull. Their addresses are: *Cahiers*—146 Champs Elysées, Paris 8. *Positif*—Editions de Minuit, 7 Rue Bernard Palissy, Paris 6.

LINDSAY ANDERSON.

**THE PUBLIC IS NEVER WRONG, the Autobiography of Adolph Zukor, with Dale Kramer. Illustrated. (Cassell, 15s.)**

*Reviewed by James Morgan*

Anecdote, the customary basis of Hollywood autobiography, proves in the case of Adolph Zukor's chatty reminiscences of fifty-odd years in the film business to be almost everything. His career opened traditionally: an immigrant from Hungary, he was working for two dollars a week at the age of fifteen, had accumulated seven or eight thousand dollars by the time he was twenty-one (he had devised a special clasp for fox furs) and by 1903 had given up the fur trade for the cinema—or, rather, for the operation of a profitable string of penny arcades. He was showing “talkies” in 1908 (with actors speaking from behind a screen), brought Sarah Bernhardt's *Queen Elizabeth* to America, was one of the first to realise that full-length films could be popular, and starred Mary Pickford in her first feature. To implement the slogan “Famous Players in Famous Plays” he made films with Lily Langtry and Minnie Maddern Fiske, and later brought Dietrich and Maurice Chevalier from Europe; William S. Hart, Valentino,

John Barrymore, Gloria Swanson and Pola Negri all worked at one time or another for his company.

It is about his stars rather than himself that Mr. Zukor (and his collaborator, Dale Kramer) has chosen to write. Blandly he describes salary negotiations with Mary Pickford ("a million-odd-dollars-a-year salary was all I felt I should pay") and the studio rivalry between Pola Negri and Gloria Swanson; he tries to dissuade John Barrymore from jumping through a real stained glass window; he advises Mary Pickford not to "flaunt the public" by becoming involved in a divorce case; he watches Douglas Fairbanks playing baseball with Babe Ruth. Few of these stories throw much new light on the people involved (though it is intriguing to learn that Franklin Roosevelt once submitted a script on the life of John Paul Jones, and that the scenario department contrived to lose what was apparently a very bulky manuscript), and of Mr. Zukor himself one gains little impression. He is benevolent and he is discreet, but the essential quality of an autobiography is that it should reveal something of a personality, and Mr. Zukor's account of his remarkable career manages to remain almost as impersonal as a publicity hand-out.

**CHAPLIN, THE IMMORTAL TRAMP, By R. J. Minney.**  
**Illustrated. (George Newnes, 16s.)**

*Reviewed by David Robinson*

Nearly everything there is to say about Chaplin has been said before, and Mr. Minney has drawn extensively in this biography upon the work of earlier chroniclers. He is able to add nothing to the scanty knowledge of Chaplin's earliest days (where was he born?), though his account of Chaplin's ancestors is new, illuminating and credible.

Mr. Minney's chief first-hand informant has clearly been

Syd Chaplin Senior, and his reliance on him sometimes results in a false emphasis; of the formation of United Artists, he says mysteriously: "Syd had worked it all out." Someone has misremembered, too, the famous incident of Charlie taking over the part of Jimmy the Fearless from Stan Laurel in the Karno sketch. We are told: "Charlie saw immense possibilities for comedy and expressed his readiness to take on the part in another company. Karno formed one at once for him." This seems unlikely; and Stan Laurel's own recollection is of losing the part outright to Charlie. One is constantly jarred by slight inaccuracies—particularly in the descriptions of films—which the reader will not need to have pointed out to him. Perhaps Mr. Minney writes too quickly; he tells us that the Chaplin children "partook of it (their soup) with avidity"; seeing *The Gold Rush* we "sit on the edge of our chairs with tension"; and "one is able to discover more and more in his films the poetry of movement."

The book has a few things to justify it. It includes some well-chosen quotations to describe Chaplin's methods and theories (irritatingly, no source is cited); there is Elinor Glyn's description of Chaplin as Christ; a revealing (if accurate) account of Charlie's contract with Mutual; a description of his attempt (in 1931) to escape the crowds on a tour of the old Halls he knew, and his distress, after two hours *incognito*, at not being recognised. Finally, there is this vivid back-stage glimpse of the ageing clown:

"He advised them (his soldier sons, about to go overseas), with many gentle gestures and a stroking of their tall shoulders, for they towered above him, not to touch anything in case it went off. They laughed, until they saw the tears in Dad's eyes. After all, he added most gravely, there were such things as booby traps. They tried to reassure him. Their training had taught them to handle all that, but he wasn't reassured. 'You ought to be most careful,' he said."

## ***The Seventh Art***

In Boston, Anthony Santangelo, 12, showed up after a four-day absence, explained to his frantic family that he had been to the movies, seen *A Girl for Joe* seven times, *Living It Up* three times, *Garden of Evil* four times, *Gone With the Wind* three times, *Duel in the Sun* seven times. (*Time*.)

★

You have never really seen Gregory Peck until you see him in CinemaScope. (Advertisement caption: *Night People*.)

★

California housewife Mrs. Nora Littlebroome recently put down her dusters and picked up a wheelbarrow which she pushed 40 miles to Hollywood to advertise her qualifications for the role of an Amazon in a picture she had heard Warners were making. Unfortunately Warners had no such picture in mind. . . . (Warner Bros. publicity hand-out.)

★

Mr. F. B. Page turns in a good [publicity] campaign for *All The Brothers Were Valiant*. . . . A member of Mr. Page's staff was rowed out 400 yards to a buoy marking a wreck and stayed there for the three-day run of the film. (*Kinematograph Weekly*.)

★

The voice of Australian opera singer Marjorie Lawrence will not, after all, be used in M-G-M's film of her life, *Interrupted Melody*. . . . Miss Lawrence's voice, rules producer Jack Cummins, "does not go with the physical appearance" of actress Eleanor Parker, who will portray her on the screen. Another singer will be chosen, he says. (*The Daily Express*.)

★

"I shall be Lady Jane Holland—she was a friend of Byron's or Shelley's, you know—with my own accent." (Joanne Dru, as quoted in *The Evening News*, on her part in *The Black Prince*.)

David O. Selznick announced that he would return to production with a film version of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*:

"I regard it as one of the greatest stories for motion pictures ever written, and it contains many of the things to be found in its American counterpart, *Gone With the Wind*." (Press release from the Selznick Studio.)

★

A feature movie keeps children off the streets, is profitable, entertaining and allows pupil supervision with a minimum of effort and expense. (Brochure of United World Films, Inc.)

★

The prohibition of smoking at children's matinees was advocated at a meeting of the Edinburgh Educational Committee last week. A woman councillor said she recently went to a matinee performance and was surprised to find that many of the children were smoking. One boy, aged about nine, even handed a cigarette case round to his friends. (*Variety*.)

★

"Should leave any audience with a warm glow of satisfaction at the fade-out." (Advertisement caption: *What Every Woman Wants*.)

★

Sexually degenerate film criticism and comment is more brazen and common than most Americans realise. An especially pathetic example of its insanity (and evil) is the following from an article in the April/June issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*: "I half-believed, until I met Garbo, the old hilarious slander which whispered that she was a brilliant Swedish female impersonator who had kept up the pretence too long; behind the dark glasses, it was hinted, beneath the wild brown hair, there lurked the features of a proud Scandinavian diplomat, now proclaiming their masculinity so stridently that exposure to cameras was out of the question." (*Films in Review*.)



## THE SOUND TRACK

In 1948, Humphrey Jennings was working on the script of a film about the London Symphony Orchestra. He died in September, 1950: the film was never started. For a period of some months, Jennings had sat in on various rehearsals and concerts of the L.S.O., recording vivid impressions in a high-speed telegraphic scribble. Noël Goodwin and the late Hubert Foss worked carefully through these notes, and they have now been published in a slightly edited form in *London Symphony: Portrait of an Orchestra* (Naldrett Press, 18s.). By strict literary standards it would be difficult to find a more incoherent jumble of words than Jennings' notes, yet for this very reason they constitute perhaps the most penetrating study into the mind of this film-maker so far published. For example, to anyone who has experienced a morning rehearsal of "The Messiah" in the Royal Albert Hall on a cold January day, a "cross-cut" word image on a group of workmen swinging a lighting batten into position above the rehearsing orchestra and soloists is irresistible. "The soloists just indicate their parts—sitting like monks. Roof: 'Up on that one, Harry!' Soprano singing angel's recitative without music in 15. 'Up, Harry! Wo!' '17, please.' '2 bars from the end—really have a short bow at the end then it doesn't go on.' 'Good.' 18: In the gloom under the dome the unlit lamps swing and clank. 'Up!' Imagine the L.S.O. seen from the point of view of Harry in the roof! '21 is out'—everyone marks this."

Again and again, Jennings reveals his interest in the quality of sounds. "Kingsway Hall 2.30 p.m. Individual tuning and warming up, especially brass, is a fascinating thing; there are definite systems—remember particularly the squeak of the woodwind's reeds on their own" . . . "clarinets have a little case of reeds like a fisherman's flies—carry them in their mouths and so on; they squeak like bats. . . ." He even captures Malcolm Sargent's characteristic vocal imitations when addressing various sections of the orchestra during rehearsal: "'Violas—ti-ya, ti-ya . . . ! Bassoons and horns—la da di da-da—all yours—take your time. . . ' To 'cello leader, 'Just play it to me, will you?' ' . . . Clarinets, just let me hear pa-pa at the start. . . That's too short . . . pa-pa . . . perfect! '" Those who wish to approach as close as possible to the eye and ear of a poet and a film-maker will find considerable scope in these "Working Sketches of an Orchestra."

*Film Composers in America: A Checklist of their Work* has been published in a limited edition in Hollywood by Clifford McCarty. Consciously restricted in its intentions, the book serves a valuable purpose for anyone needing facts and figures on the 163 American film composers whose films are carefully listed in chronological order.

JOHN HUNTLEY.

## COVER COMPETITION

The response to our competition for a new cover for SIGHT AND SOUND was most gratifying. The number of entries received was far greater than we had ever expected, and this, together with the general high standard of the entries, made adjudication a much greater task than we had made provision for. With meeting after meeting, shorter list after short, the process took a good deal longer than had been anticipated: we thank all competitors for their forbearance.

The entries came from several countries, including India and the United States, though the majority were from this country, and especially from London. The competitors included a large number of professional designers; and it was interesting to see how well the amateurs held their own against these, even if the execution and presentation of their designs was sometimes less impressive. In style the entries may be classed in six main categories: University Press style; "contemporary" (some of these already seem somewhat dated); traditional magazine cover ('thirties style); symbolic; wall-paper; and lunatic fringe. We were particularly impressed by the trouble and expense many competitors had given to the job, in having stills specially printed to use on their designs: and it was interesting to find that a number of those who had used a still had chosen the same one—the picture showing Gérard Philipe, Joan Greenwood and the dog from

*Knave of Hearts* (SIGHT AND SOUND), January-March, 1954, p.117).

The selection committee themselves learned a number of valuable things from the designs submitted; and the first of these was how difficult it is to design a wholly original cover which is not violently eccentric or quite unacceptable. Next to good and attractive layout and design, the sales value of a cover is an important consideration; and it was evident that the most successful designs from this point of view were those that incorporated a large still. One of the runners-up achieved its high placing almost solely on intelligent presentation of a near full-page size still. There were a number of exceptionally well laid out covers made up entirely of displayed letterpress, but these were regretfully rejected from the final short-list, as lacking sales-appeal and distinctiveness; most were immediate reminders of well-known and old-established literary reviews.

A remarkably large number of competitors concentrated on the presentation of the two capital S's, or on symbols representing "sight" and "sound." Perhaps the title itself is not ideal; at least the former appeared in the designs as meaningless symbols; the latter as somewhat misleading ones, more remote from the significance of the magazine than the title itself.

The prize of £50 has been awarded to Mr. JOHN HARMER, of Hove. The verdict on this entry's superiority was unanimous. Its usefulness is impaired only by the small size of the still included in it; it is hoped that Mr. Harmer's design may be adapted in this respect so that it can be used for the cover of future issues of SIGHT AND SOUND.

The runners-up are:—

2. JOHN HARMER, with a second design.
3. VIVIAN RIDLER, of 14 Stanley Road, Oxford.
4. PETER CARTER, of 83b Fellows Road, London, N.W.3.
5. LARRY A. CARTER, of 43' Smith Terrace, Chelsea, London. S.W.3.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### Straight Questions

*The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND.*

Sir,—It is sad to find that John Grierson's powder, once so sharply explosive, has gone damp with the years. I was not of an age to read his writing on Documentary—and other aspects of film production—when it first appeared, but even in reprint it keeps its freshness and its relevance. One's point of view may differ: there is still no doubt of Dr. Grierson's ability then to hit fair and square a number of targets that urgently needed punishing. The same can hardly be said of the first two instalments of his Review of Reviews. Indeed so erratic has his shooting been, and so dubious his targets, that it is only after some hesitation that I undertake this reply. Three considerations have urged me to do so. First, the tempting openness with which his yo-ho-ho style of writing exposes itself to the direct parry of logic; second, the number of references to myself, which seem to call for a personal reply; and third, the impression which his observations seem to have made in some authoritative quarters. Mr. Richard Griffith, for instance, with his talk of "Glasgow Rock." Is he not perhaps thinking of the Edinburgh variety—that rather crumbly sweetmeat, with more dazzle on its tartan wrapper than substance within, fast disintegrated by a decisive crunch?

First I must make it clear that I agree with Dr. Grierson on one point at least: that criticism has its importance, its dignity and its responsibility. Criticism of the cinema, as indeed of most of the arts just now, is at a low level. A serious attempt to point out its general defects, to seek some reason for them, to suggest worthier methods and approaches—this is something we would all welcome. Dr. Grierson's attempt fails because it is fundamentally unserious. His writing has less the flavour of the just man's *saeva indignatio* than of the exhibitionist's reckless self-display. I do not ask for impartiality; a critic should take sides, should support those whom he considers to be doing good things, or at least

encouraging the good. But his support—and his dispraise no less—must be based on a sincere attempt to understand the point of view of his subjects, a regard for fact. A critic should not be “pretty humble” (Dr. Grierson’s view); he should be humble.

Besides humility, the criticism of a work of art calls for precision and delicacy; so also the criticism of criticism. Trenchancy comes next, after you have got your facts right and your conclusions in order. Dr. Grierson’s articles have been, on the contrary, remarkable for their disorder, their absolute lack of definition, and their consistent avoidance of argument. Who, to start with, are “the critics”? Before a subject of this kind can be broached at all, there must be some definition of terms. A critic is not a journalist; nor can a journalist be reproached for not writing like an academic critic. What then are the functions and duties of each? If you wish paradoxically to maintain the superiority *as criticism* of the film reviews in the *Evening Standard* or *The News of the World* to those in SIGHT AND SOUND (Dr. Grierson evidently inclines to this point of view, or at least quotes it without rebuttal), then you must at least be prepared to give some grounds for your opinion. Quote some facts. I don’t know, for instance, if Mr. Karel Reisz qualifies in Dr. Grierson’s imagination as one of those “intellectual Teddy boys who have recently been in the ascendant,” whose generosity is compared so unfavourably with that of Mr. Peter Burnup and Sir Beverley Baxter; but I presume that this biting phrase is intended to refer to the reviewers of this magazine. So perhaps in his next article, Dr. Grierson will lend substance to his implications by comparing Mr. Reisz’s review of, say, *Knave of Hearts* with Mr. Burnup’s pithy analysis of the same film in *The News of the World* (“50,000 French girls can’t be wrong”); and by demonstrating the superior encouragement afforded by the latter comment to M. Paul Graetz and M. René Clément in their attempts to produce interesting, adult pictures. Mr. Gavin Lambert is presumably another of these intellectual neo-Edwardians whose recent ascendancy we are invited to deplore. May we hope that the implied denigration of his critical work will be rather more precisely substantiated in Dr. Grierson’s next instalment?

One subject which occupied a good deal of space in the first of these Reviews of Reviews was that of “Discovery.” “The critics” have in the past few years neglected new talent, works of originality which Dr. Grierson feels should have been encouraged: that at least appears to be the charge. We read on with interest. Perhaps it is true that we have been blind, or lazy, or ungenerous. If Dr. Grierson can make a few specific instances plain to us, perhaps even at this late hour we can do our best to rectify our omissions. But—“the hungry sheep look up and are not fed.” All I get to bite on, for example, is a reproach for having written a thousand-word piece in *The Observer* on the occasion of the start of the Stroheim season at the National Film Theatre. This seems to me as reasonable as censuring a literary critic for attempting to earn an honest penny with a note on, say, George Eliot, on the occasion of a new edition of her novels. What should I have been writing about instead? And why “instead”? To such questions Dr. Grierson remains silent. Either he is as blind as we are, or there has simply been no new talent to discover.

In his second article, Dr. Grierson varies his approach, but the result is hardly more satisfactory. Instead of committing himself directly, he takes cover behind a number of correspondents, some of them anonymous, and presents us with their views in a manner which seems to approve, without however accepting responsibility. A Review of Reviews surely signifies something more than a correspondence column for the cranky and the ill-informed; but having himself initiated the enquiry, Dr. Grierson is apparently content to evade the responsibility of examining and assessing the worth of the contributions he has provoked. They are mainly absurd. There is even something touching in the gratitude with which Dr. Grierson acknowledges these extraordinary letters; is excited to learn that the President of the Oxford University Film Society “reads anything from a dozen up to twenty reviews of any given film”; and tips us off about Maurice Cloche, Alec Coppel and Andre de Toth. If there were stronger evidence of humour anywhere else in Dr. Grierson’s writing, one would suppose that the whole thing

were an elaborate spoof.

But I am afraid Dr. Grierson is in earnest; and—which is more disturbing—has been taken seriously by a number of people, some of whom ought to know better. And in so far as the subject really is a serious one, calling for hard thought and constructive discussion, they are right. Perhaps they will accuse me in my turn of being too wholly negative in my comment. Very well: let me give some positive leads. Dr. Grierson talks a lot about “the SIGHT AND SOUND critics.” But what does he take their values to be; what are the theories, or the fallacies, on which the critical writing in *Sequence* and SIGHT AND SOUND is based? I am charmed to have stimulated Lady Elton: but what does Dr. Grierson think of my estimate of Humphrey Jennings? In writing about Ford as a great and currently underestimated poet of the cinema, in seeking to interpret his work—where specifically has my critical method been at fault? What are the distinguished or emerging talents that the critics have wrongfully neglected? What of the directors first made known in this country through the pages of SIGHT AND SOUND and *Sequence*? Bresson, Becker, Visconti, Sucksdorff, Gremillon, Polonski, Antonioni, Castellani, Rouquier, Franju, Broughton. . . . Were these not worth discovering? What about the films which were written about in these magazines before they were ever shown in London (in some cases they only achieved exhibition here because of this notice); or which were otherwise neglected by the critics? Let me recall a few titles: *They Live By Night*, *The Window*, *Lumière d’Eté*, *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*, *People in the City*, *Muscle Beach*, *Sotto il Sole di Roma*, *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, *La Terra Trema*, *The Young Guard*, *Los Olvidados*, *Wagonmaster*, *Les Anges du Péché*, *Le Diable au Corps*, *I Bambini ci Guardano*, *They Were Expendable*, *Cronaca di un Amore*, *La Règle du Jeu*, *Le Sang des Bêtes*, *Farrebique*, *Umberto D.*, *The Undeclared*, *Les Amants de Verone*, *The Sun Shines Bright*, *E Primavera*, *Les Parents Terribles*. . . . Would Dr. Grierson ever have seen *Summer Holiday* or *The Pirate* if he had not read about them in *Sequence*?

Well, that should be enough to be going on with. When this letter appears, Dr. Grierson will still have the last of his four articles to write, so I hope I may look forward to some straight answers to these straight questions. And in case he is still left with some space to fill, let me present him with a couple more. Who is in a better position to encourage new and promising talent—a critic or a producer? And is it proper for a producer to undertake an enquiry such as this, to chastise critics for their lack of appreciation of new work, without first making very clear his own position in the matter?

Yours sincerely,

LINDSAY ANDERSON.

57 Greencroft Gardens, N.W.6.

### A Review of Reviews

*The Editor*, SIGHT AND SOUND,

Sir,—“His blind adulation of Ford is a standing joke amongst us”—so the President of the Oxford University Film Society dismisses Lindsay Anderson, according to Grierson’s presumably approving quotation in the second of his “Review of Reviews.”

As one of “us” I, at any rate, resent being committed to this apparently unanimous disapproval of Anderson’s criticism. Readers need turn only to his review of *The Sun Shines Bright* to discover that he is quite aware of that film’s shortcomings. He was also ready to indicate the roughnesses of *The Quiet Man*, but, unlike every other critic in the land, he did not label the film as hokum or, at best, as good entertainment; instead, he revealed the outstanding merits of the film and, thereby, I hope, earned the gratitude of more than one film enthusiast.

May we have more of this “blind adulation” rather than, for example, the “impartial” criticism of Campbell Dixon and Beverley Baxter, who have both recently reviewed *Robinson Crusoe* without once mentioning the name of Bunuel!

Yours faithfully,

M. J. W. HIGGINS.

St. Edmund Hall,  
Oxford.



## Shell Film Unit

*The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND.*

Sir,—I very much enjoyed Stuart Legg's article on the Shell Film Unit (SIGHT AND SOUND, April/June), and I wonder if I might add a word about Alexander Wolcough who, next to Arthur Elton, has contributed most to the success of the Unit. As Publicity Manager of the Shell Group during the greater part of the Unit's life, Wolcough fought its administrative battles with insight, determination and a debonair skill.

As the producer who had the privilege of setting up the Unit, and who was again responsible during its period of war service, may I take an appropriate opportunity to record an appreciation of the creative freedom which Wolcough secured for his film-makers? Much of the Unit's output reflects Wolcough's own quiet distinction as a worker in the field of public relations, a field whose special nature he fully understood and himself helped to extend in a number of new directions. It is a great loss to documentary film-making that Wolcough should now have moved on to other activities on behalf of his Company.

Yours faithfully,

EDGAR ANSTEY.

British Transport Films,  
25 Savile Row, W.1.

## Film Finances

*The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND.*

Sir,—The sorry story of British Lion as outlined in your magazine's supplement gives rise to at least one very important point.

The Annual Report of the National Film Finance Corporation admits that "the degree of independence given to, or

assumed by, some of the producers is such that full information, especially when units are on location, is not always provided." In view of this, it is difficult to be sympathetic with Mr. Havelock-Allan's protest against "the old cry of wastage and inefficiency."

Surely before the merits or otherwise of the N.F.F.C. loan and the Eady Levy are decided, some pretty drastic investigation of how money is spent is of first importance. Only then can it be decided whether blame for this unfortunate state of affairs should be assigned to the economic structure of the film industry or to the irresponsibility of its servants.

Yours faithfully,

RUPERT BUTLER.

18 Draycott Place, S.W.3.

## Knave of Hearts

*The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND.*

Sir,—I was delighted to find SIGHT AND SOUND rapping so many critical knuckles over the pathetically huffy reception given by the Press to Clément's fascinating *Knave of Hearts*. My pleasure was considerably tempered, however, by the arrival of the August issue of *Critics' Choice*. "Gérard Philipe applies Parisian love-making to London ladies; another X-cursion in the continental manner" seems rather worse than the *Daily Mirror's* "A story about a French wolf who comes to prey on our girls."

There are many recent instances of this kind of situation. SIGHT AND SOUND continues to preach to the converted, but its sister publication appears to have despaired of the masses.

Yours faithfully,

DEREK HILL.

11 Woburn Court,  
Bernard Street, W.C.1.

(THE METTEUR EN SCENE, *Continued from page 66*)

been dealing, and to some extent they influenced everyone—Visconti especially. But it is fitting: Welles breaks all the rules and cracks like a plant out-growing its pot the very capacity of the category we have established. For of all the *metteurs en scène* he is the most gifted and the most startling. Like many of the others he came from the theatre; he had created his sensational modern production of *Julius Caesar*; his radio programme on the Martian invasion had spread panic among its audience. Now, with all the resources of the cinema at his disposal, it was to be expected that he would be even more potent. Seen for the first time, *Citizen Kane* is just that. The punches are so quick and deadly that his problem becomes not so much one of keeping our attention as of getting us to recover fast enough to take more punishment. Every trick, every effect known to the expert illusionist and master shock-tactician is deployed, down to the screech of the cockatoo. Viewing the film again, one sees not so much this naïve desire to shock and stun but the prodigious, squandering invention.

As serious drama the films mean nothing; the conception and development of the characters is on a magazine journalistic level. But this doesn't matter: when one has said it, one has said nothing about the films themselves. They are not so much dramas as gossip; rich, exhilarating, fabulous gossip about the times and the places and the people Welles has known. Certainly Welles has no moments of great penetration or insight, but as a presentation of the externals, the public personalities of men, their fights, their defeats, their celebrations, his films have never been surpassed. Welles scatters his fine images like an Eastern prince his jewels, and he can range from a splendid, sonorous catalogue of the properties, the castles, the swimming pools, the statues, the zoos, to scenes of the subtlety and complexity of Agnes Moorehead giving George Amberson his supper. Above all it is the prodigality of energy, the sheer splendid life and go of it all, that makes his films so invigorating. Anyone who has created the dazzlingly lovely party sequence in *The Magnificent Ambersons*, or the entrancing sledge ride in the snow, has raised talent to a pitch where it is indistinguishable from genius.

With anyone like Welles the distinction I have been making seems arbitrary, so narrow is the gap between him and the

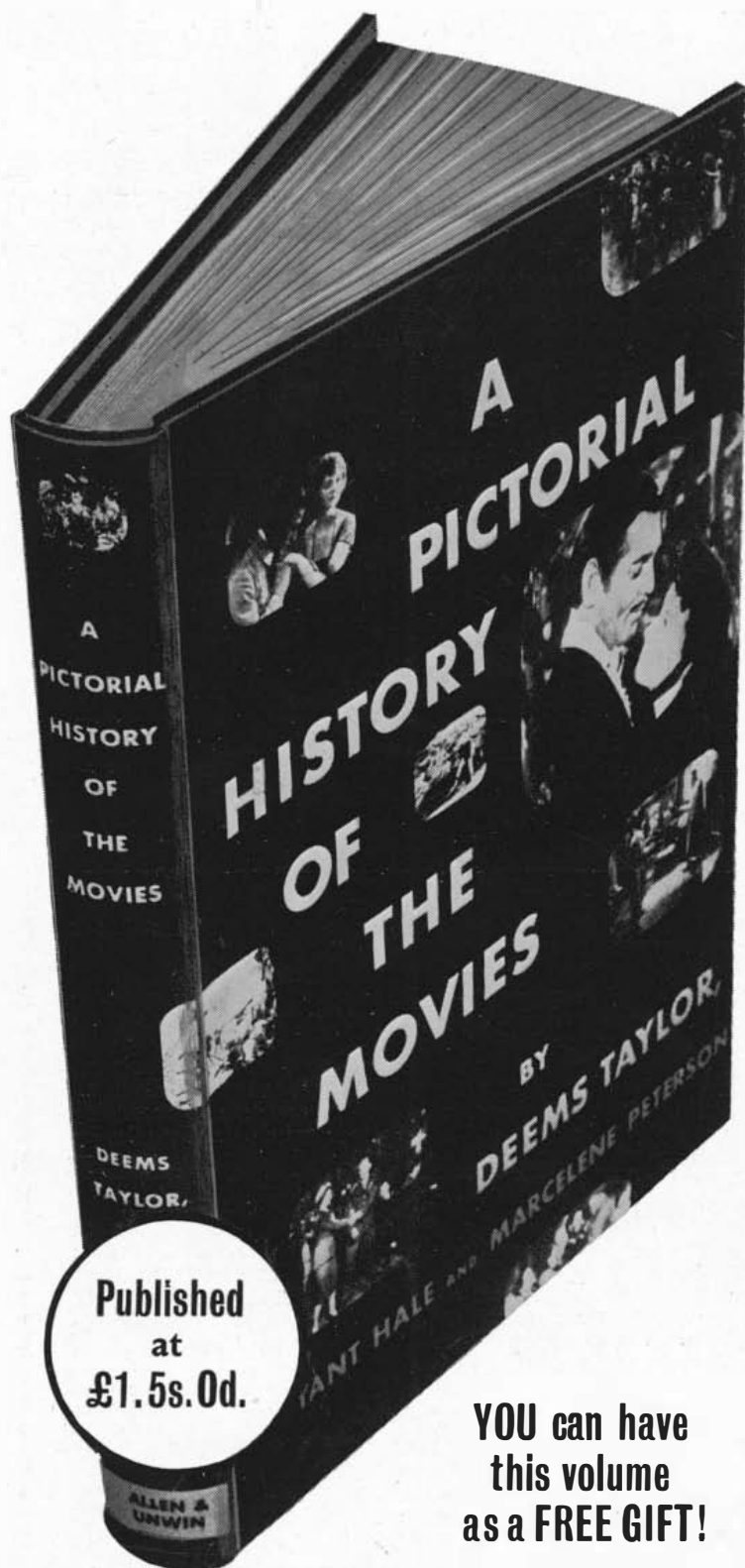
"creator" proper. He has given us so much pleasure that it seems pompous and ungrateful to make a final assessment: when one does, however, the gap still remains. Between the two, levering them apart, is the *metteur en scène's* self-consciousness—or perhaps, more accurately, self display. Not all artists are as deliberately self-effacing as Flaubert or as ultimately elusive as Shakespeare: some have made their art from their very self-consciousness. But one thing they all have in common—they are possessed by as much as possessing their subject, Proust by his illness as much as Chardin by his plums. The real Marcel Proust ceases to matter beside the narrator of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. That is what separates them. "How shall we know the dancer from the dance?" Yeats asks his chestnut tree. As the *metteurs en scène* jump and pirouette, do their *entrechats* and *grande battements* in the arc lights and great follow-spots of their ego, we know the dancers all too well. But if sometimes they seem vain and showy and mannered, often how exciting, how brilliant, how clever they are.

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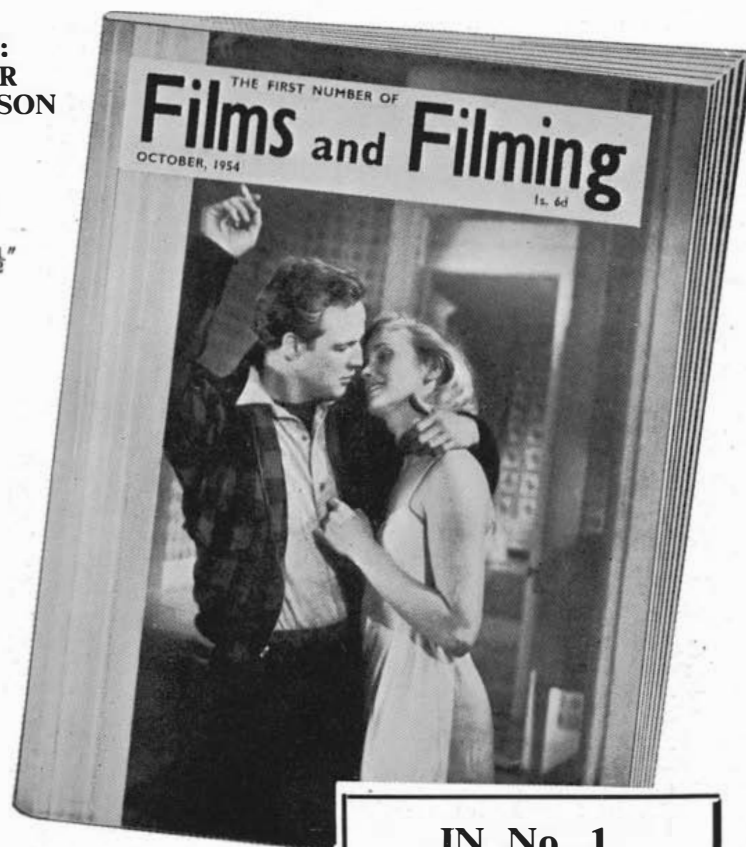
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(THE FILMS OF KUROSAWA, continued from page 78)

is a Japanese term, *Ukiyoe*—pictures of the passing world (including both colour print and naturalistic cinema), that comes closer to Kurosawa's conscious aim.

## VI

Kurosawa has not been unaware that it was the exotic beauty of *Rashomon* that provided its passport to the world, and for the past year and a half he has been completing another bid (more deliberate this time) for the approbation of that world. That a Japanese film studio would permit such an extravagant expenditure of time is an indication of Kurosawa's post-*Rashomon* status. The new film is entitled *Seven Samurai*, but it is not an adaptation from Japanese literature or theatre. It is based on an original idea, set in a long-past time: seven warriors, unattached to the retinue of any lord, offer themselves to right wrongs done to peasants and the poor. This may be Kurosawa's boldest effort, uniting the moral strength of his social films with the physical beauty that he and his colleagues apply so richly to the Japanese past. The writer-director, trained as a painter, should show his most dazzling "Japanese style" in this film.

That he sees the new film as a natural step in his artistic growth is indicated by his continued use of his acting stock company. Both Shimura and Mifune have roles in *Seven Samurai*, but not necessarily chief roles, for Kurosawa prefers to the star system the more flexible methods of a good repertory company. From the time he first assembled this "stock company," and though moving himself and it from studio to studio, Kurosawa has turned from it in only one film, *Wonderful Sunday*, although he has always enjoyed mixing new faces with his old reliables.

His cameraman, too, is part of his company, although for *Rashomon* he used a cameraman at the Daiei studio skilled in the "beautiful" photography of the Sternberg imitations; this widened the photographic range usually employed by Kurosawa, but also opened the film to the Japanese critics' comments on its "European" style.

An element lacking in *Living* (as in *Wonderful Sunday*) is the climax of purgative violence that has its place in every other impressive Kurosawa film—the clash between students and police in *Youth Feels No Regret*, the knife-fight of *Drunken Angel*, the struggle in the underbrush of *Stray Dog* (when detective and gunman grow too exhausted to go on fighting!) and the several versions of *Rashomon*'s rape and sword-fight. A full artistic satisfaction—for spectator as for maker—seemed impossible in a Kurosawa film except after such an explosion; I had begun to feel that this was a basic feature of Kurosawa's Japan. The lack of such a climactic episode in *Living* shows perhaps a new willingness on his part to place greater reliance on the fundamental ideas and attitudes of each film. Fortune again may have been just to Kurosawa, for *Living* is the first of his "modern" subjects that may reach Western audiences, after gaining some attention (under the distorting title of *Doomed!*) at this year's film festival in Western Berlin. But perhaps we too need to be shocked before we accept original film talent—and we'll have to wait for *Drunken Angel* after all.

In addition to the six Kurosawa films I have seen, information for this article has been drawn from translated contributions to Japanese periodicals (especially *Kinema Jumbo*), and from an interview with Kurosawa by Ray Falk, in the *New York Times* (January 6th, 1952). The Japan Society, Inc., New York, has also contributed information and assistance.

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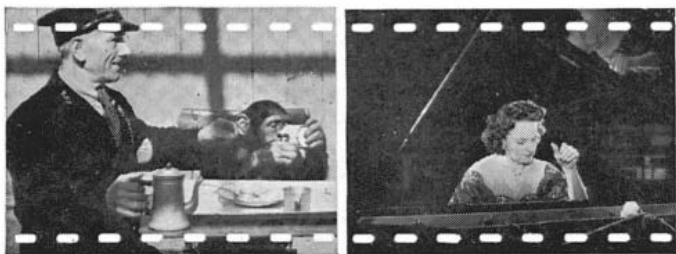
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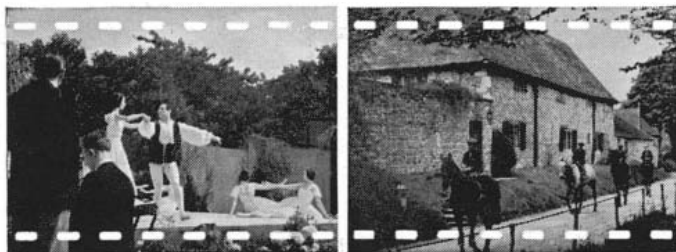
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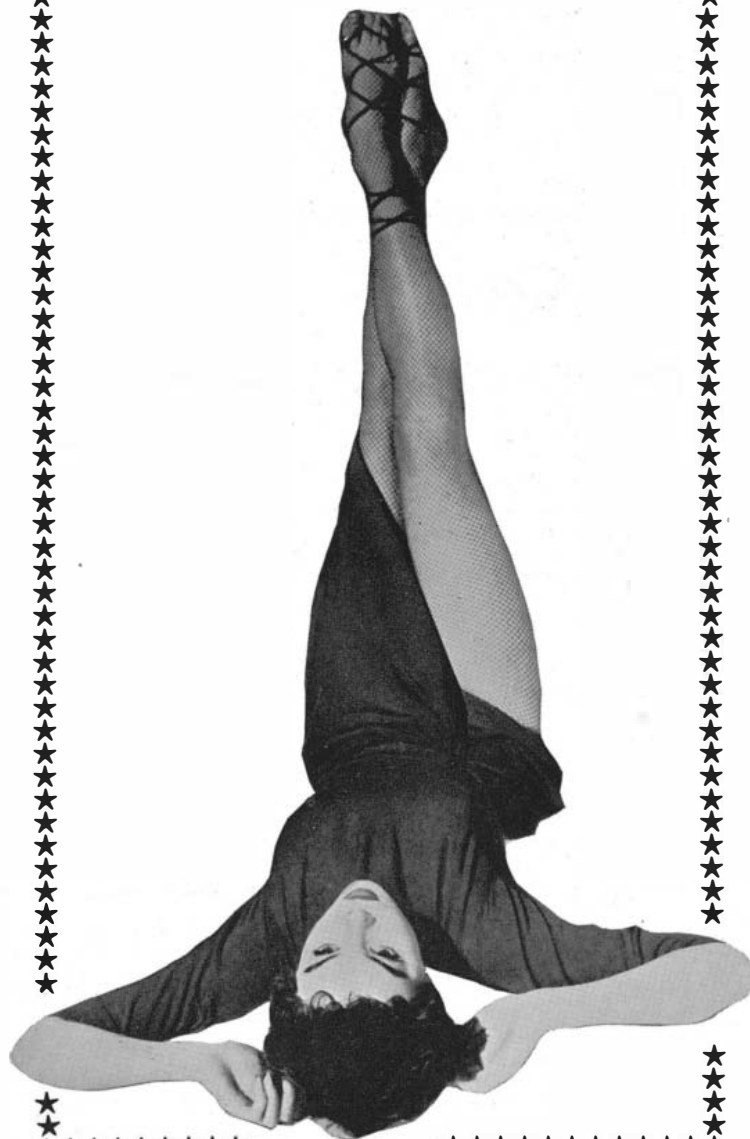


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